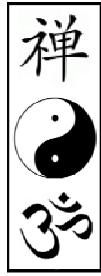


Dogs, Cats & Dreams of Spiritual Awakening

Stephen Wingate



Dogs, Cats & Dreams of Spiritual Awakening
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Contents

Foreword	ix
Introduction	x

Part I Meeting Dialogues

1. Stay With I Am	11
2. The Outrageous Myths of Enlightenment	14
3. Dogs, Cats & the Entertaining Natural State	18
4. Everything is Happening to No One	20
5. Awakening to the Dream	22
6. The Fall from Grace	24
7. The Joy of No Me	46
8. Awareness vs. Consciousness	49
9. Mother Theresa and Charles Manson Happened	52
10. What Are You going to do About the Ego?	53
11. The Sense of Ego is Free to Come and Go	55
12. Get Clear on This	58
13. I Am Consciousness—So What?	63
14. The Pit Bull is Dead!	72
15. The Puppets and the Puppeteer Are One	79
16. Magical Powers and More Enlightenment Myths	81
17. What Happened When You Finally Got It?	84
18. Practices to Do?	85
19. I Realized there's No 'Me' to Get Enlightened	88
20. So, What's the Problem?	90
21. Seeing What I Am Not	94
22. Everything is Falling Into Place	95
23. How Do I Avoid Involvement with the Character?	97
24. The Universe Says, "Meow!"	99
25. My Seeking for Enlightenment has Come to an End	101
26. Who Gets Enlightened?	102
27. The Garden of Eden	103
28. Playing in the World of Duality	104
29. I Wanted to be Superman as a Kid	106
30. No Suffering—No Enlightenment—No Embodiment	109
31. This Ain't It-That Ain't It—Neti-Neti	111
32. That's Interesting—Now Throw It Away!	137
33. Fighting—Surrendering—Forgiving	140

34. Willow Trees and Egos Happen	144
35. Self-Realization, Awakening & Enlightenment	146
36. The Mysterious Choiceless Awareness	173
37. You and Me are the Same Mystery	175
38. The Mind is the Tool of Division	177
39. Free Will	178
40. Do You Know Anything At All?	180

Part II Correspondence

1. I Thought, “How Obvious, Damn!”	182
2. I Got Back Into the Seeking Again	183
3. Your Spiritual Search is a Joke!	184
4. Points of Consciousness in Awareness	185
5. The Guy Who Thought it was All Done	187
6. How Can You Say, “All is One?”	188
7. These Words Apply to You!	191
8. What Does Nisargadatta Mean by This?	195
9. Enlightenment is the Problem—Not the Solution	196
10. I Expected More, Bigger and Better	199
11. Not Just a Cute Spiritual Metaphor	201
12. Everything is Self-Perfect in This	207
References for Quotations	210

Foreword

It is a privilege to write a few words as a foreword to Stephen's book, *Dogs, Cats and Dreams of Spiritual Awakening*.

I first met Stephen in 2004, not long after I began sharing the 'spiritual pointers' myself. Stephen had been investigating various spiritual teachings over a period of years with the intention of resolving his suffering and doubts. His searching lead him to the teachings of Nisargadatta Maharaj (as presented in the book *I AM THAT*) and from there to the teachings of Nisargadatta's student, 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, currently residing in Melbourne, Australia. Stephen contacted 'Sailor' Bob. Bob suggested that Stephen get in touch with me, since I was in the U.S. sharing the message also.

Within a few weeks, he flew out to see me in Santa Cruz. We met and had a chance to talk over the basics. I reviewed with him the fundamental pointers that I had received from 'Sailor' Bob about our true nature as presence-awareness and how the cause of suffering, questions and doubts arises through believing ourselves to be a separate being apart from that. These were the insights that 'Sailor' Bob shared with me and helped resolve my own searching and suffering.

Now Stephen is moved by a sincere interest to help others who might be struggling with suffering and doubts. Out of his genuine and heartfelt concern to be of help to others, he began to share his understanding with seekers in the Boston area.

As you will find in this book, his talks on the truth of who we are, are consistently direct and to the point. He returns again and again to the important themes of clarifying our identity and resolving the root cause of suffering. While these themes are universal and form the essential message of Nisargadatta Maharaj and 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, Stephen has cast them in his own unique voice. He puts them across with a freshness and clarity that make the message very accessible to a contemporary seeker.

I am delighted to see the publication of Stephen's second book of dialogues. I am sure many will find in these pages clear pointers to the truth of what we are and what we are not.

John Wheeler
Santa Cruz, California
14 December 2006

Introduction

Are you dreaming about Self-Realization, Awakening, Liberation and Enlightenment?

In these dialogues we look into that question together. And what you may find is that what you're seeking, what Self-Realization is, what Awakening is, what Enlightenment is—it's what you already are.

When we're really suffering, it seems to me, and this is what happened with me and with most people—when you're really suffering, you're at the end of your rope and you feel like you can't take it anymore, then you find out. That was my experience. I don't know if that's necessary. But you just can't take it anymore; you can't take living as a separate person.

The ancient traditions point to the fact that at the root of all suffering and seeking is the sense of being separate—separate from our fellow man, separate from God, separate from all of creation. And having to fight, struggle, kick and scratch our way through this life. It's not easy living like that. The spiritual literature says that the end of all spiritual seeking and psychological suffering comes when we see that we're *not* separate, there is no separate person here. And—seeing what you *are* in essence, noticing what you are in essence. It's not an attainment. It's not something new. At the root of psychological suffering and spiritual seeking is a misconception—that is believing you are something you are not.

There's one coin of seeing what you are. There are two sides of that coin. One is seeing what you *are* in your own direct experience, which is very simple. It's not a new state, it's not an attainment. And the other side of the coin is seeing what you are *not*. The misconception of believing and feeling that you are something that you are not is at the root of psychological suffering and spiritual seeking.

When these fundamental pointers are seen clearly, the one coin of what I am, who am I?—then psychological suffering and spiritual seeking fall away. And we awaken to the dream.

Stephen Wingate
Boston, Massachusetts
January 2007

Part I Meeting Dialogues

35

Self-Realization, Awakening & Enlightenment?

Diana: Is it unfair to ask, as I have not read your book, what do you think is Self-realization, or are you going to tell me to read the book?

[Laughter]

Stephen: That's the question I wrote in the book, *The Outrageous Myths of Enlightenment*, "What are self-realization, awakening, liberation and enlightenment?" So that's the question most people have who are seeking spiritually.

Diana: So, can I ask you now?

Stephen: Well, I can ask you that question and we can talk about it. If you're interested, then we can see. What you may find is that what you're seeking, what self-realization is, what awakening is, what enlightenment is—it's what you already are. You can hear this and say, okay, I agree—but it's conceptual.

Diana: Right.

Stephen: When you are really suffering, you're at the end of your rope and you feel you can't take it anymore, then you find out. That was my experience. I don't know if that's necessary. You just can't take it anymore. You can't take living as a separate person and you're ready to kill yourself—I was at certain points.

Then you'll find out what self-realization is, what awakening is, and what enlightenment is—you'll find out there isn't any. It's seen there is no such thing as enlightenment, and there is no person who can be enlightened. There's no separate entity.

All suffering comes out of this sense of being separate. You're a separate person and you're not good enough, there's something wrong with you—so you're suffering. When it gets to a certain point the realization can happen that all suffering stems from this sense of being separate—a separate person who has to make her own way in the

world, and it's not easy. So we turn to different approaches, and we go down different paths in our life. Because it doesn't feel quite right, something feels wrong. There's the sense that something is wrong with me. Something is wrong with me, and something is wrong with the world.

The ancient traditions point to the fact that at the root of all suffering is the sense of being separate—separate from our fellow man, separate from God, separate from everything. Being a separate entity and having to fight, struggle, kick and scratch our way through this life. It's not easy living like that. So we read about the fact that the end of spiritual seeking and psychological suffering comes when we see we're not separate, there is no separate person here.

Diana: But how do you see that? The only way to see that is to experience it.

Stephen: Well, the spiritual literature says that at the root of suffering is this sense of being a separate person, and we notice that in our own experience. We notice, well, let me see if it's true in my own experience—is my suffering happening when I feel I'm separate? In other words we look into what's happening when we're suffering.

Lenny: What is your experience? Without reading about it what is your personal experience?

Stephen: My experience of suffering?

Lenny: Yes, without talking about what you read. What is your personal experience?

Stephen: The suffering brought me to the point where I was willing to look into some fundamental questions. The fundamental questions are—what am I? Is there a separate entity here? The spiritual traditions say there is no separate entity here, and the sense of being a separate person is at the root of all suffering. So the suggestion is to look in your own experience and see if that's true. Is there any separate entity here?

Lenny: And what did you find out?

Stephen: For me the suggestion was to look and see if there's any

separate entity here. So you question that, and you say who do I feel I am? Who is Stephen? Who is Lenny? Who am I? When you say, Lenny, what do you mean?

Lenny: I'm asking about you.

Stephen: Right, well, I don't want this to be only about me. This was beneficial for me so I want you to look, too—because this is not only about me and my experience. It's about both of us—it's about all of us.

When I looked in my experience and asked who is Stephen? Who do I feel I am? I felt I was in control. I am the controller of Stephen's life. If you ask me, who is Stephen? I am the one who's in control of Stephen and his life. I'm in control of his thoughts and I'm responsible for his thoughts. I'm in control of his feelings, his sensations, his relationships, his career—Stephen. I'm the one who's in control of making sure my life experience works out. Making sure I'm happy most of the time, and I avoid sadness. That's who I felt I was. That's the sense of ego, the sense of being a separate, controlling entity, a separate person who must take control of his life experience.

Ramana suggests this and many others—find out who you are. Who am I? This was the process for me. Looking into and questioning, who is Stephen? I could feel an energy here in the chest and stomach. It's an uncomfortable energy. It's an energy of resistance. Resisting what I don't like, and trying to grasp onto what I do like. So it's a sense and a belief that I'm in control of my experience. I'm a separate entity who can control his own experience—control his thoughts, his feelings, sensations, actions, relationships, and career—the whole package. So this is who I felt I was.

So now I'm questioning that. What is this energy of resistance? What is it based on? Is there any separate, controlling entity here? Is there any separate person here? The ancient traditions say there isn't one. They say if you see there isn't a separate entity here, and all is one, then there's a sense of relief that happens.

This resistance that I felt I was, this ego, you can feel it in your stomach, in your chest, in your neck. It's a sense of resistance to what is. You want to resist the unpleasant experiences, and grasp onto the pleasant. You want the good, and you don't want the bad. And there's a 'me' here, an ego who wants to do that.

If there's a belief that there's a separate person here who can control his experience, then it's questioned. We look and we see, well, if there is an ego, if there is a separate entity here who can exercise

control, if this ego I believe I am has any power, then it should be able to exercise control, right? It should be able to control thoughts, feelings, sensations, and actions. If there is any separate, controlling entity, any separate ego here, it should be able to take control of his life, shouldn't it?

Either I'm in control or I'm not. It's black and white, there's no gray. There isn't just a *little bit* of control. If there's one little part you're not in control, then there is no control. Either there is a controlling entity or person here or there isn't. It's not a little bit. It's not that I can control *this*, but I can't control *that*.

So I'm looking into this uncomfortable energy of resistance which is the ego, and I'm questioning it. Does it have any substance? Is it real? Or is it just based on a belief? If it's real, I should be able to exercise control, shouldn't I? If the ego, this sense of being a separate person has any power then I should be able to exercise control over thoughts, shouldn't I?—and feelings, sensations, actions, behavior, all of that. If I am a separate, controlling entity, shouldn't I be able to exercise control over my experience? Yes?

So I sit here and I notice thoughts just happen. Try to take control of your thoughts—go ahead and do it. You may be successful for a short period of time, and then something will come in and disturb that seemingly successful period of control. So I'm sitting here and I'm questioning this ego. Can I control thoughts? No. Why would you ever have a negative thought at all? If you could control your thoughts, take control right now, and have only positive thoughts. What are you waiting for? Why would you wait? Thoughts happen. If you don't believe that, then go ahead and take control of your thoughts. Good luck.

So I notice in my own experience there's no separate entity here creating or controlling thoughts—thoughts happen! Positive thoughts, negative thoughts, whatever you want to call them, they just happen. Where do they come from? I don't know. Is Stephen controlling any thoughts? I tried for quite a while to have only positive thoughts, it doesn't work. So there's no separate ego here controlling thoughts.

What about feelings?—happiness, sadness or any feeling. If there's a separate entity here who can exercise control, then I'll be able to control my feelings, and have only joy and happiness, and never have anger or sadness. So let's see if I can exercise control. If there is an ego here, a separate entity with any capacity to control, surely it can exercise control. Then why am I waiting? Why don't I go ahead and have only joy all the time? So, happiness and sadness, joy and anger—

feelings just arise, they just happen. If you don't believe that, then take control of your feelings now! What are you waiting for? Don't wait until next week. So I found there is no separate entity who can control thoughts. There's no separate entity who can control feelings.

What about sensations in the body? I want only pleasure, I don't want pain. Why would I want pain? Is there any separate entity who can exercise control over sensations? If there is, why are we waiting? Why don't we exercise control now and have only pleasure? Would you ever have pain if you had control over the sensations in your body? Why would you choose pain?

There are thoughts, feelings, and sensations—that's the general experience we humans have. Then there are actions and behaviors. And we ask, what about my behavior or my actions? If there is any separate, controlling entity here, I should be able to control my behavior and actions. My actions and behavior should only be loving and kind! I should be loving, kind and peaceful all the time. I should never be angry or selfish. I should never have any negative behavior or actions. I should never yell at anyone. I should always be thoughtful and generous, loving, peaceful, kind, and compassionate—if I'm in control, right?

So, we look for a controlling entity because we believe there is a separate person who can exercise control. This is the energy you feel in your stomach and chest. This is the energy of resistance and trying to control. You can feel it, it's uncomfortable. So what is it trying to control? It's trying to control thoughts, feelings, sensations, actions and behaviors. Isn't that the human experience in general? We have thoughts, feelings, sensations, actions, and behaviors.

Diana: The suffering is resisting.

Stephen: Yes. So we notice at the root of psychological suffering, and we feel it in our own experience, is this energy of resistance—I like this, I don't like that, and trying to control.

Lenny: I was thinking it's also about how we are taught to see what is good and what is bad. Like pain is bad. This is how we're taught, it's not because we choose to see things that way.

Diana: It's conditioning.

Lenny: It's conditioning. Because if you are able to accept everything

the way it is, there is no more suffering. There's no more resistance.

Stephen: We want to get to the root of this, because the way you put it, there's one key we want to focus on, you said, "If *you* are able to accept," if *Lenny* is able to accept, if *Diana* is able to accept.

Lenny: If you surrender.

Stephen: If YOU surrender! We want to look into this YOU, Lenny. Is Lenny able to accept, is Jason able to accept, is Charles able to accept, is Diana able to accept, is Stephen able to accept? Who is this *you* that is able to accept?

Lenny: It's an image of what I think I am.

Stephen: Can the image you have of yourself do anything at all? This makes it personal when you look in your own experience and ask, is Lenny able to control? We want to get to the root of this. So in this investigation of 'who am I?' we notice this resistance, this ego. We question it and recognize that everything is happening—thoughts, feelings, sensations, actions—it's all happening. Even resistance is just happening. This uncomfortable energy is just happening. I'm not doing that, it's just happening.

I thought I was this Stephen character, a controlling entity. In this investigation, this observation, looking into this it's seen there's no one here. How do I see this? Because I thought I was controlling thoughts. I thought Stephen was in control of thoughts, and it's seen that thoughts just arise, they just happen. So where is Stephen? What's Stephen's role in the thinking process if thoughts just arise? Is Stephen the thinker? If I am the thinker, then I should be able to exercise control over thoughts. I can't do it! So, Stephen is not the thinker. There's no thinker here. Then you check all of your experience—thoughts, feelings, sensations, actions, behaviors, and you look for the one who's doing them and you find nothing, no one!

Lenny: You could say Stephen is the body.

Stephen: It's a label. There is no psychological suffering for the body. It's only this image of me, Stephen, who can suffer psychologically. The resistance comes about because of the assumption based on the unexamined belief in the existence of a separate entity, a separate ego

called, Stephen.

When it's seen there's no Stephen here, and thoughts happen, feelings happen, sensations happen, actions happen. There's no Stephen here. I am not the separate entity I thought I was, so, what am I? My entire life that's who I thought I was—this energy of resistance. I'm the one who's in control, and it's seen I am not that, there's nothing here, there's nothing here!

I've seen that through this investigation. And I've confirmed it by trying to *exercise* control. You say, okay, I don't find any controlling entity here, but maybe I've overlooked it. So I'm going to make this investigation practical, and ask can I *exercise* control? If there's an entity here in each of us that has any separate power, surely it can exercise that power! So I'm making this investigation practical.

Diana: I understand. I understand the thoroughness of the investigation. Now is that something you've experienced?—the non-existence of the controlling entity? Like the way you experience pleasure? Or the way the form has experienced pleasure or pain. It was helpful for me to hear your presentation of the investigation, I enjoyed that. But my next question is have you had an experience, because you are still in form. So this form has or has not had the experience of non-separation?

Stephen: The first part of the investigation is based on looking into this separate entity.

Diana: I understood that, and it's clear.

Stephen: The second part will answer your question. All my life I thought I was this ego.

Diana: Right, right, right.

Stephen: It's clearly seen there's no one here.

Diana: Right, I understood that totally.

Stephen: The next question is, if I am not the ego I thought I was my entire life, then what am I?

Diana: Okay, that's still not answering my question, that's in between.

Stephen: We'll get there.

Diana: Okay.

Stephen: What I am is the peace you're talking about, it *is* the absence of separation you're talking about—what *I am*. Seeing through what I am *not*, the sense of separation falls away.

Diana: Right.

Stephen: What's left? What's left is what's always been here.

Diana: Right.

Stephen: This will answer your question, stay with me. I know what you mean. Just go along with me. Because there is no one who experiences the absence of separation. There's no one to experience the bliss. There's no one to experience the peace. See, it's not for a someone! The question, 'Have you experienced the absence of separation?' is based on a premise that there is someone here to experience the absence of separation—see how that doesn't work? The question comes from the perspective of a person who wants to...

Diana: No, it comes from, well, we are still in form here.

Stephen: There is no one in form. The question is based on the premise that there's a person here, and there are separate forms. That's going through the mind. There's no separation until you think, until the intellect is exercised.

I want to talk about what we are. Your questions are all going through the mind. There's no separate form. There's no separate person who experiences the absence of ego. There's no separate person who experiences bliss. There's no separate person who can be enlightened. There's no separate person. There's no separate form! If we remove one atom of hydrogen from the water molecules in your body it will fall apart.

Diana: Yes, but that keeps it together, that one molecule.

Stephen: Without thought there is no separate form. We're going through the mind and trying to see that all is one, and the mind is the

tool of division.

Diana: Right.

Stephen: We're using the tool of division to understand that all is one. We can't do it. And to experience oneness—can't do it. The mind is the tool of division, the tool of separation, the tool that labels me and you, form and spirit. That's the tool we're using to see that all is one.

Diana: Do we have a different tool?

Stephen: That's the tool we humans use. But there is no 'we' who has any tool. The universe is expressing itself. I know what you're talking about and I'm trying to chip away at answering your question.

I want to talk about what we are. My interest is in sharing the fact that it's possible to be free of spiritual seeking, and free of psychological suffering. I stick with the fundamentals of what we are, and what we are not. Through this recognition there is a relief from the seeking and psychological suffering. Then you'll have a new perspective on your ideas of experiencing the oneness, and all the ideas that come up. You'll have a new perspective. It'll be a perspective from the sense of the fact that you are this awareness that's watching everything that's happening, so there's a new perspective. You'll notice these concepts and questions that come up are much less important. You'll see the questions don't even matter because you're at peace, and it doesn't matter what questions come up.

Diana: Questions that come up are like what?

Stephen: The questions are mental noise. They have nothing to do with the peace you really want. There's the sense if I get my questions answered, then I'll live in peace. What we really want is this sense of peace, the sense of love, the sense that everything is okay.

We go down different paths, and we have all these questions. We think if I get my questions answered then I'll have the peace, the sense of relief, the sense that everything is okay. But you'll notice getting your questions answered has nothing to do with the peace you really want. You'll notice the questions are noise in the background. But *you* are the peace.

I want to talk about what we are. There's no separate entity here, so what am I? There's one question, who am I? There are two sides to

that question. One side is seeing what you are *not*, which is a separate ego, because that's at the root of psychological suffering, the sense of being separate. So it's seen through this investigation there is no separate entity here. That's seeing what I am *not*.

If I'm not this separate person, this separate entity, then what am I? What is it about us that's always here and has always been here? It's never changed—it's always been witnessing, watching. It's this awareness, this consciousness.

This consciousness that we are has always been here. This consciousness that I am watches thoughts come up, it witnesses questions that come up. It witnesses the question, who am I? It witnesses the silence when there are no questions. It witnesses the happiness and the sadness. It was aware of the body when we were younger, and it's aware as we get older. The body was young, and it's getting older, but the consciousness is still the same.

You remember when you were a child, the consciousness looking out at the body, and the body looks different now, but the consciousness is the same as when we were little children. It's this looking, this seeing. It's aware of everything in this room right now. It's aware of these words. It's aware of the thoughts that are arising in response to these words. You hear these words and then thoughts arise in response—there is awareness of that. This awareness has always been here. It has to be here. It's primary. It's essential. It's what you are in essence. It's what we all are in essence—this awareness, this witnessing presence that's just watching. It's not something you can do—this awareness—it just is. So we notice this seeing is happening, this awareness is happening—it's just happening. It's what I am. It's what you are. And it's watching all of this. It's aware of everything in the room—this awareness that we are. It's very peaceful. There are no problems with it.

Diana: Yes.

Stephen: This is what I am.

Diana: I understand that. I am aware of that. I experience that.

Stephen: It's pretty nice—this awareness.

Diana: Yes.

Stephen: This is what we are—this awareness. There are no problems. Problems are in thinking, and thinking based on a belief that ‘I’ am in control of my experience. There’s no one here, there’s only awareness. That’s what I am. What do I do? I watch. I just watch.

Diana: What is the content of your everyday experience? Where does that come from?

Stephen: It’s a mystery. Where do thoughts, feelings, and sensations come from?

Diana: No, just the experience.

Stephen: Where does my experience come from?

Diana: Yes, are you waiting for everyday to present its mystery, or what’s your input?

Stephen: Well, we’re all the same in essence. The same is true for you. It’s not possible that we’re different. I didn’t attain anything. No one attains anything.

Diana: I understand that, but I’m asking about your daily experience, what informs your everyday life?

Stephen: What I am is this watching, this witnessing presence is what I am.

Diana: I understand that.

Stephen: So, what does this witnessing presence do? What is the experience of this witnessing presence? It witnesses, it watches.

Diana: But, you do something everyday.

Stephen: I don’t do anything.

Diana: Okay, you don’t do anything.

Stephen: Everything happens. From the perspective of what I am—I watch. That’s what I am. I am this witnessing presence, and so are you.

Diana: Right.

Stephen: That's what you do, too—you watch. That's the only thing you've ever done, everything else has happened. Do you create the oak trees, and the grass, and the flowers—do you do that?

Diana: No, but that doesn't help me understand what I'm asking you.

Stephen: Do you create your thoughts?

Diana: More and more I witness my thoughts. But I am asking you a specific question.

Stephen: Everything is happening, that's my experience. Everything is happening. I'm not doing anything.

Diana: You're not doing your work, you're not...

Stephen: Oh, I work. Work happens. See, there's a difference when it's seen there's no one here doing it. You're asking me what do I do, and from an absolute perspective of what I am—I watch. I watch this Stephen character work, eat, feed the cats, and clean the house.

Diana: So that's your experience of life?

Stephen: I watch these thoughts happen. I watch these meetings happen. I hear these words happening. Who's doing it? Who is creating these words?

Diana: So, that's your experience, you're not there?

Stephen: I am the witnessing presence, and so are you!

Diana: I understand that. Is that your experience?

Stephen: The question is based on a false premise—what is your experience? There's no 'I'. See, that's the whole point. There's just consciousness witnessing. If you want to know what I am doing—I am witnessing. That's what I am.

Diana: So you're witnessing your pleasure, and witnessing your pain.

Stephen: Yes, and so are you.

Diana: Well, you can't speak for me because you don't know. Ask me, please. Theoretically you are assuming that's my experience, but practically that may not be my experience. That's what I was trying to ask you, if that's your experience. Because I understand conceptually that's the truth, but whether we are there is another question. If you are telling me that's what I'm experiencing, I'm going to say, no! That's a concept. I experience that some of the time, witnessing my experience. But, no, I can't say that's my experience.

Jason: You see it when you don't witness, too, is that what you're saying? Do you notice when you're not witnessing?

Diana: What I'm saying is I'm not in that place where I am witnessing all the time.

Jason: How do you know that?

Diana: I feel it! It's not a matter of knowing—that's how I know, by feeling. I understand what you are talking about, but my experience is I still experience pleasure and pain. The more I deepen my experience of who I am really, the more I can witness some of it, but it's not a permanent experience. That's where I draw my information about who I am, it's from my experience. That experience is deepening maybe, of who I am, truly. But I'm not there all the time.

Jason: Who sees that you're not there all the time?

Diana: It's not a matter of who. I understand the question, but I don't experience that! I understand all of the concepts you've presented so wonderfully.

Jason: You say sometimes you're witnessing and sometimes you're not—when you're not witnessing, you're noticing that though, aren't you? You just mentioned sometimes you are, and sometimes you're not, right?

Diana: When I'm not witnessing, am I aware of that? Yes.

Jason: You must be.

Stephen: I'll speak from my own experience, I felt that, too. I thought there were flip-flops from witnessing to being identified with the person and the thoughts. I thought there was a flip-flop. What I realized is the witnessing is always happening, this consciousness is always happening, whether the sense of a flip-flop happens or not. There's always a 'seeing' of it. There's always a witnessing of it. The false sense of a flip-flop was based on a belief that if I know myself as this consciousness, as this awareness, then my experience will meet certain expectations—there will be peace all the time, loving-kindness all the time, there will never be anger, I'll have only positive thoughts—those were beliefs I had.

Diana: That's something different.

Stephen: What happened to me for a while, and I thought it was a problem, I thought I was losing this consciousness or this awareness because negative thoughts would arise, and I thought, well, I shouldn't be having any negative thoughts if I really saw this. If I really knew myself as consciousness I wouldn't have negative thoughts.

Diana: But everything is in this consciousness including negative thoughts.

Stephen: Right, even the sense of ego.

Diana: Right.

Stephen: For a while there was a belief that I lost it. Because I believed I shouldn't be having this disturbing energy, I shouldn't be having negative thoughts. There should be peaceful, loving kindness all the time. But that's not what's being pointed out. What's being pointed out is what I am. I am the witnessing of it. And the witnessing of it is never gone. The awareness or the consciousness that I am is always witnessing, it's always watching, it's always seeing, it's always aware of the sensations in the body, it's always aware. It's what I am in essence, it's primary.

If there is no awareness or consciousness, there can't be any belief in a flip-flop, there can't be any uncomfortable energy—there can't be any sensations without this awareness. For a while I had these beliefs that if I really knew that I am this awareness, then my experience—

thoughts, feelings, sensations and all of that would meet these certain criteria. If I wasn't happy, peaceful, blissful, calm, loving and kind all the time, then I lost it. And it's seen that what I am is the witnessing presence that's watching my experience go from loving, peaceful and kind, and then flipping to the ugliness of the ego. But I was always there watching it.

Diana: The ego is not even ugly. It's just different colors of the same consciousness. That's a judgment

Stephen: Yes, right. I'm using words to describe the experience.

Lenny: We can say it's aliveness. All those things happen, judging, the pain, all those things happen.

Charles: Well, I really get that thoughts happen. I'm getting them almost constantly and there's awareness of them, and the emotions, too. But my actions—I hit a wall with that because my actions are more concrete.

Stephen: Right, that's very common. If you follow your actions back, what usually happens prior to an action? In most cases, unless it's a reflex, aren't most actions preceded by thoughts, feelings, or sensations? Someone may say something about Charles and you get offended by it. So a response happens and maybe you strike back. And you say, well, I should be in control of my actions. But isn't it true that actions are preceded by thoughts, feelings and sensations? And then an action follows—isn't that the case?

Charles: Well, what about other decisions you think out, like whether I should loan money to someone, or whether I should put a new roof on the house, or buy a new car—things like that. These are things you think out rationally, supposedly, and then you take action.

Stephen: Right, so if you follow any action, even an action like that, making a decision to put a new roof on the house, or should I buy a new car? If you follow it back, a thought or a series of thoughts happen, and an action follows. Isn't that the case? Every action that happens in my experience, other than a biological reflex, involves thought—thoughts happen and then actions follow. So where is the actor? Where's the thinker? Is there any entity creating the thoughts? Is

there any actor creating the actions? Or is thinking happening, and acting happening? It seems to me that everything is happening, even the actions. There's nothing that isn't simply *happening*.

Charles: It's more difficult to avoid psychological pain during the decision making process when you have to make a decision that affects someone else. It seems you can't avoid the psychological pain that's there.

Stephen: Well, what if you see there's no Charles? There's no separate Charles creating the thoughts. There's no separate Charles creating the feelings. There's no separate Charles creating the sensations. There's no separate Charles creating the actions. So, what is Charles' role in the decision making process? What is Charles' role?

Is there any Charles there to take credit if things work out well for everyone involved? Is there any Charles there to take the blame if things don't work out well? Is there any Charles there? Is there any Charles there who can suffer? Do you see how the recognition that there is no separate Charles there resolves all psychological suffering, and spiritual seeking? All psychological suffering and spiritual seeking are from the point of view of a separate Charles. What if there is no Charles? If you are not Charles, then what are you? You are the witnessing presence of Charles and all the actions that happen. That's who I am—who you are. There's no separate entity there.

Lenny: This is still a belief, am I right? It's still a belief?

Stephen: What is still a belief?

Lenny: That you are awareness.

Diana: Or there's no one there.

Lenny: It's still a belief. It's not...

Diana: ...an experience.

Lenny: Right, it's not an experience. It's something you got through the mind using the mind as a tool and it's still a belief, it's not an experience.

Diana: What drives your actions? People may have a thought to take a certain action. All sorts of thoughts come to mind, and there's no one there, according to what I understand, and then you act on the thoughts. What makes the discernment there between taking certain actions like should I climb up a tree or should I go to work today? There are many choices. If no one is there, then thoughts happen and there is action and nobody is responsible. That is my question, what drives the actions and choices in your life?

Stephen: The same thing that drives you. What's the source of the universe? What's the source of an oak tree?

Lenny: I don't know?

Stephen: It's a mystery.

Diana: Yes, but I can't talk about something I don't experience. I'm not experiencing that mystery. I'm experiencing the beginning of the day...

Lenny: Even 'mystery' is a concept.

Stephen: Everything we're talking about is a concept in order to put it into words. If we see it's all concepts, then you are free of the concepts.

Diana: No, you can't see unless you experience it.

Lenny: Exactly.

Diana: Unless you experience something, you can't really see it. It can help to see the concepts.

Stephen: Okay, well, I'll stick to the basics because there are a lot of different questions that arise, and for me they were all resolved. There are an infinite number of questions we can ask.

Diana: That's why I'm asking you a specific personal question that might help us understand. What drives your actions and choices during your day? As much as you know the concept there is no Stephen, and you are watching everything, still everyday you are involved in this

form, and you are participating in various activities. So I am asking you, what determines your choices in your daily experience?

Stephen: How would I know? It's a mystery. What makes an oak tree an oak tree?

Diana: I think you do know, because you must have an experience.

Stephen: The only experience I can speak of is that I am witnessing.

Diana: That's your only experience.

Stephen: That's my experience.

Diana: So you are completely detached from everything that's happening?

Stephen: No! There's no one here who's detached! From the perspective of a separate me, which is a false premise, all these questions arise. Like what is your experience? There's just witnessing! I'm trying to answer a question based on a false premise.

Diana: So you can't answer because you are so identified with awareness, who you truly are.

Stephen: No! There's no one who's identified. There's just one—consciousness. You say, answer my question! And the question is, what time is purple? I can't answer that question because it's based on a false premise! Regarding your other questions the false premise is there is some separate entity who has an experience. Some separate entity who can be identified or detached. My experience is I am this witnessing presence watching the show, and the show happens.

Diana: You're watching the show. So how do you answer his question as far as making choices that involve other people?

Stephen: This witnessing presence that I am...

Diana: But he's not there. He's not experiencing what you're experiencing.

Stephen: I can only answer from my own perspective, and the

realization that we're all the same in essence.

Diana: So the moment we understand theoretically that we are all witnessing...

Stephen: There are two sides to it. What you are is the witnessing presence, and you are *not* a separate entity.

Diana: Right, so the moment I understand that fully...

Stephen: We could say, 'see' that.

Diana: See that fully, then I'm free of suffering and then...

Stephen: There's a new perspective, I'll put it that way. Because if I believe that I am Stephen...

Diana: I understand that thoroughly. So if I understand that thoroughly I'll be free of suffering and I'll be self-realized?

Stephen: There's no one who's self-realized!

Diana: Well, I have to ask the question from where I am. I mean the fact that Stephen is not here is your experience, but it's not mine.

Stephen: Then my suggestion to you is the same that was made to me, and the suggestion is to look and see if you are a separate entity. Is there a separate Diana there?

Diana: Yeah, I asked that question many times.

Stephen: That's what I suggest because if it's seen in your own experience—who is this Diana you feel you are? Who is this? Who is Diana really? Who is it that I feel I am. I felt I was the disturbing energy of resistance I talked about earlier. Then it's my own personal investigation. It's not like opening Ramana's book or Krishnamurti's book, and repeating the question, who am I? Who am I? Who am I?

The suffering and seeking brought me to the point where I felt I trusted what they were saying, but it wasn't my experience so I'm going to find out. The suffering brings you to the point where you look and say, what is this that I am? I felt this disturbing energy and I didn't

like it. So what is this energy? And it's realized it's the sense of being in control, the sense of being a separate person. So is there any control? And it's just seen, no!

This separate entity I thought I was, this disturbing energy was based on a belief, and it's creating all of my suffering. So I look and see there's nothing here but a disturbing energy and a belief that I am in control, I am a separate, controlling entity.

So I question that and make it practical—can I control my experience? No! Thoughts arise. Feelings arise. Sensations arise. Actions happen. There's no one here! There's no one here controlling anything. So what am I? My entire life I thought I was this controlling entity. I am not that. So, what am I? I am this consciousness. And then there's a sense of relief, ahh. What a relief!

Now, it's like Stephen's life is on television. I can turn the television on and watch Stephen's life just happening. Either Stephen is a nice, kind, sweet guy or he's not. There's no separate entity here doing it. Whatever's happening is happening. Consciousness is watching.

I've always been this watching. There was no suffering when I was a child until this ego developed. From the time we're about two years old, and it gets bigger and bigger, stronger, heavier and more painful. This sense of ego, this sense of being separate is at the root of the suffering. We look and see there's nothing here. So there's a sense of relief as the resistance drops away. What's left? This witnessing, this watching that's always been here. It was here before the development of the ego in the human experience, it's here during the expression of the ego in the human experience, and it's here after—this witnessing.

That's why you'll hear this is not an attainment because you haven't *attained* this consciousness that you are. The peace we want is this consciousness that we are. Even as this activity and movement is happening here, my hands and arms are flailing about, I'm speaking loudly and I appear quite animated, consciousness is watching it! It doesn't matter what's happening here. I'm not doing it. There's no separate entity here. No one is doing anything. You think you're doing things! You're doing nothing! Everything is happening.

I don't care what your experience is. You think you're doing things, there's no one there doing anything! It's not possible for you to separate yourself from the rest of creation—Diana is over there and she can exercise control, it's not possible! Does an oak tree decide it's going to be an oak tree? And this year it decides it's not going to produce acorns and it wants to be a pine tree! That is absurd!

The capacity for thought has developed in the human experience, and the thought 'I' am in control arose in the human experience and it's believed. This is the fall from grace. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—I know good from evil, I know right from wrong. It's the intellect, the mind.

The oak tree doesn't know good from evil—it just is. It is life itself and you are, too! But you have the capacity for thought. The thought 'I' arose and that's the birth of the appearance of separation. But there is no separation. Thought does not actually separate the universe into little pieces. The thought 'I' has no power!

Just because you think 'I am,' 'I am Diana' doesn't make it true! It's just a thought. The thought arises in the human experience, the thought 'I', and that is the birth of the appearance of separation, the fall from grace. Being separate from God, knowing good from evil you'll suffer all the days of your life—it's right in Genesis. If you believe 'I am Diana' you'll suffer. There's nothing you can do about it. That's the human experience. If 'I am Charles,' then Charles will suffer.

Charles: When you talk about separation, I get hung up on separation in form. I do see separation here in this room.

Stephen: No you don't.

Charles: [laughing in disbelief]

Stephen: It's a thought. Without thought there's no separation. Until thought arises, (you read J. Krishnamurti, right?)—you can see this in your own experience, until a thought arises there is no separation. If you don't have the thoughts, 'I am Charles, I see Stephen, I see the bottle,' there's no separation.

So, does thought actually separate the universe into little pieces or does it just appear so? It just appears so, because when there's no thought, there's no separation. If we remove one atom of hydrogen from the water molecules in your body, the whole thing falls apart. Nothing is separate. The air in this room goes into your body as you breathe it in, and then you exhale. The air in this room *is you*. The water in these bottles *is you*. There's no separation. Is the water in your body 'you', but the water in the bottle is *not you*? Are you only an atom of hydrogen? It's just a thought.

All of that is interesting talk. But at the root of psychological suffering is the birth of thought, 'I'. When the thought 'I' arises and

the identification with this body and mind happens, that's the birth of the appearance of suffering—the fall from grace.

Charles: Can someone who has realized this continue to go about their daily life, or do they become a teacher or something? Because it seems if you think in terms of non-separation you couldn't go through your full day. I drive a delivery truck for a living, and I have to have a sense of separation to do that.

Stephen: Life is happening. Everything is already happening. You've never done anything. You're not doing anything now, and you were never doing anything. If you have the recognition that there is no Charles, Charles is just a concept—life is still happening. Your heart is beating right now—you're not beating your heart. Your eyes are seeing, Charles is not creating the seeing. Everything is happening, Charles has never done anything. The thoughts arose, 'I am Charles. I am the doer.' Those thoughts arose and are believed to be true. But even then, everything is simply happening.

The mysterious source, whatever it is that creates oak trees, dogs and cats, is creating every thought, feeling, sensation, and action in your experience. It's the same mysterious source. There's no separate Charles creating actions and there never was.

You posit that if someone has this recognition they wouldn't be able to go about their business—their business is already happening! It's already happening right now! Whatever it is that creates the oak tree is creating everything that's happening here. There's no separate entity creating anything. Could Charles separate himself from the mysterious source of all existence, God or Universal Intelligence, and then start doing his own thing? Is that possible? And if so, how did you do it? Having any sort of insight doesn't change what's happening. Universal life, this Mysterious Source is already expressing itself. It doesn't one day begin expressing itself after Charles realizes that Charles doesn't exist, and from that day, God takes control.

Lenny: But Lenny can choose...

Stephen: Choices happen. Lenny doesn't do anything! Lenny is an idea. Can an idea do anything? If you want another idea that's more accurate you could say Universal Intelligence makes choices—it's a mystery. Choices happen. Is there any individual chooser? If there is a separate chooser, Lenny, why would he ever choose sadness? Why wouldn't he choose happiness all the time? Could it be there is no

separate Lenny there choosing? And the Mysterious Source is expressing itself? Could that be the case? If so, what is Lenny's role in Lenny's life? He has no role!

The witnessing presence watches the show and you're done with trying to control. The uncomfortable sense of 'I want this, I don't want that' is based on a false belief in a separate Lenny. There's no one there. What's left for you to do? Nothing! Just watch. Everything is already being done!

The Mysterious Source of all existence, Intelligence Energy is already expressing itself! Every thought, feeling, sensation and action that's happening here is the same Mysterious Source expressing itself here, here, here, there [referring to everyone in the room] and through the oak tree. Even the sense of ego is an expression of the One Mysterious Source. There's nothing wrong with anything. Everything is what it is. If there's a sense of being separate, there's a sense of being separate. Did the ego create the ego? Everything is just happening.

Oh, wow! I get so fired up sometimes, Jason.

Jason: That's a good one—can the ego create the ego?

Lenny: But that's still a belief. Even this is still a belief.

Stephen: When you throw away all of your beliefs, what's left? What's left? Throw away all your beliefs, what's left?

Diana: Nothing. I want some water.

Stephen: Just this witnessing.

Lenny: I'm just playing.

Stephen: Me, too.

Jason: What was helpful for me was when you pointed out the 'seeing'. And the demonstration you did with seeing different objects, and noticing the 'seeing' is always the same. That really helped me. The seeing is always here, just the seeing. Sometimes finding the right word is helpful. It's this *seeing*. It's an action rather than an identity—it's just happening.

Stephen: Yes.

Jason: There's this seeing. That's what's happening—seeing. What I found is even when I'm at my most contracted, dense state, I see the contracted density perfectly—I don't like that state, and I see the disliking of it. When I'm happy, I see happiness with as much clarity as I see the contracted density.

Stephen: Yes.

Jason: The seeing is happening all the time.

Stephen: Yes, yes, that's it!

Jason: Regardless of what's being seen. I can't make the seeing stop. I don't remember making it begin.

Stephen: Right, yes.

Jason: It's always here.

Stephen: Yes, that's it.

Jason: The *seeing*, presence-awareness, or witnessing—it just happens.

Stephen: Yes, that's it.

Lenny: Is that a detachment from what is happening?

Stephen: No!

Jason: It's just happening. The seeing is impersonal. I'm not saying *Jason* is seeing. *The seeing is seeing Jason!* It's seeing everything.

Stephen: Yes.

Jason: It sees the good, it sees the bad.

Stephen: Yes. The seeing is neither detached, nor attached. It has nothing to do with any relative experience—it just *is*. It doesn't matter

what is seen. Seeing is happening.

Diana: Anyway, I guess it's not helping me see right now, but it's okay. I don't have to see that.

Stephen: Okay, I have more to say, but I don't want you to yell at me.

[laughter]

Diana: Right, but somehow in this moment it's not helping me, and that's okay. Not everybody sees, and that's okay. Not everybody at all times has to see. Right now I don't see. I'm okay with that.

Jason: You're saying you don't see, but are you seeing that?

Diana: I'm seeing that I'm not seeing, and I'm okay with it.

Jason: But you're seeing it?

Stephen: Even seeing that you're not seeing is seeing.

Diana: I don't need to see that right now! It's okay. I'm okay with this tonight.

[laughter]

Stephen: Okay.

Diana: I don't have to see.

Jason: My point is that even when you see that you don't see something, you're still 'seeing'. The seeing is always here.

Diana: I don't know. Right now I don't need to see.

Jason: But you are seeing.

Diana: I just don't need to see!

Jason: But you are. You are seeing.

Diana: Well, that's what you're saying and telling me. But I'm okay with not seeing right now. I am at peace with it.

Jason: I think you are seeing.

[laughter]

Stephen: That's alright.

Diana: I'm okay with not seeing tonight.

[laughter]

Stephen: Yes, everything is okay.

Diana: Yes, thank you, very much.

Charles: When you said it was always here I remembered myself in front of my house when I was a child, and it does seem like it was the same seer. I wasn't any younger (the seeing).

Jason: Right. The intellect changes, and your body changes, and your emotions change, but I feel the same. I still feel like I did when I was four years old (the seeing) as I do now.

Charles: Yes.

Stephen: You remember yourself as a child walking to school. You recall this seeing was happening, and this is the same seeing now! It's seeing a different body, different experiences, different thoughts, different ideas, but the seeing is the same! So this is what's being pointed out, it's what I am. It doesn't change.

It's the seeing, the consciousness, the awareness. You know it experientially so it doesn't matter which word we use. It's seeing different things. This is what we are—this consciousness. As we get older the seeing will be the same. We may end up in nursing homes, but the seeing will be the same!

Jason: The seeing doesn't age.

Stephen: It's timeless.

Jason: It's pure, clear consciousness.

Stephen: So this is what we are, we are eternal life, this witnessing presence—it's timeless.



Because the individual self, which is nothing but the mind, has lost the knowledge of its identity with the real Self, and has enmeshed itself in bondage, its search for the Self, its own eternal primal nature, resembles that of the shepherd searching for a lamb which all the time he bears on his shoulders. —**Ramana Maharshi**

Do You Know Anything at All?

Darren: Let me ask you this: even the mind we have, use and need was put here by this Mystery, right?

Stephen: It's just happening. That's a concept—this Mystery. When I try to understand what's happening here, what's seeing everything in the room here, and what perceives this? It's a mystery. That's why I say, this Mysterious Source. Then we observe everything in the appearance and say, that's the Mysterious Source expressing itself. I find no separation between the Mysterious Source, what I am, what you are, and everything is. It's all One. *I am* the Mysterious Source. *You are* the Mysterious Source.

Darren: It's all the Mysterious Source.

Stephen: It's all the Mysterious Source. It's one solid block of reality—one solid block of God.

Darren: I now realize my struggle to make sense of all this is perhaps what I must let go of. Because I'm trying to make sense of something that cannot be understood. When you keep using the word *mystery*, I think that's my salvation—to embrace that it's a mystery.

Stephen: Yes, burn out the intellect. You try so hard it implodes on itself. There's no way to know anything absolutely. There's no way to know anything absolutely because all knowledge is relative. What is it relative to? When you say, 'I know this,' it's relative to something. When you notice the foundation upon which all knowledge is built is a fabrication—there's no way to know anything.

Darren: And, hence, whatever you build onto this fabrication is all...

Stephen: It all falls apart. What's left is this witnessing that's happening. And I know nothing. So this is a *not* knowing. Advaita is *not* two. When you see that you know nothing and there is not two—that's it. There's nothing.

Darren: That's the end of the quest.

Stephen: That's it. I Am. There's no separate self to realize. There's nothing to do, nowhere to go—that's it!



When you say, "I really don't know," what happens? The mind becomes completely humble. Now that state of 'not knowing' is intelligence.

—**J. Krishnamurti**

Part II Correspondence

6

How Can You Say, 'All is One?'

Jeremy: Right now there is a deeper understanding that the being-ness without any 'my' to it is underlying, embracing, and enfolding all of this. The persistence of memories, images, voices, logical arguments, etc. are being witnessed as changeable phenomena.

Stephen: Yes, you are the consciousness, the witnessing, the seeing of the changeable phenomena. Without your presence as consciousness, there can be no phenomena. This consciousness that you are is the essential prerequisite of all phenomena. Notice that consciousness is witnessing these words right now. Without consciousness being here now, these words do not exist. These words have no independent existence. Without consciousness, nothing exists.

Jeremy: There is a strong thought, almost like a rip tide, that is persistent. In fact it is a question: how can this sense of being be described as 'all there is' or as universal, that is, something that everyone or everything has?

Stephen: Consciousness is not something that everyone or everything *has*. Consciousness is what everyone and everything *is*. Life is not something that everyone or everything *has*. Life is what everyone and everything *is*.

Consciousness is the essence of all existence, all phenomena. Can anything exist if consciousness is not here to witness it? Does the universe exist if consciousness is not here to witness it? Does anything exist outside or separate from consciousness? What are you in essence? What are other people in essence? What are dogs and cats in essence? What are birds, flowers, and trees in essence? What is the universe in essence? What is life? Are you separate from the universe? Are you separate from life? Is anything separate from the universe? Is anything separate from life?

Consciousness is life itself. The universe is life itself. The universe is alive. And you are that life. You cannot possibly be separate from universal life itself.

When does the appearance of separation begin? Does the appearance of separation begin with thought? Does thought actually divide the universe into separate entities or does it just appear so? Can any thought be witnessed without consciousness being here to witness it?

Is consciousness separate? Is 'your' consciousness separate from 'my' consciousness? When does consciousness become separate? Is it when the thoughts 'I, me or mine' arise? Does the thought 'mine' actually divide consciousness or does it just appear so? Can the thought 'mine' exist if consciousness is not here to witness it? Who is this 'me' that says 'mine'? Is this 'me' just a thought? Does the thought 'me' have any separate existence from consciousness? Is the thought 'me' alive or conscious?

Jeremy: As this question arises, there is an equally persistent determination which recognizes even that question is another 'yes, but,' and any thought whatsoever is only trying to divide. But the doubt does linger.

Stephen: Yes, thought is the appearance of division, the appearance of separation. But upon investigation it's noticed that thought has no independent, separate existence. The thoughts 'I, me, and mine' appear to divide life into separate entities—me-you, us-them, God-human, spirit-matter. There is no real separation, only conceptual, thought-based, imaginary.

If thought does not actually divide the universe into separate entities, then separation never happened. All is One—or not two.

There is one universe. There is one life. This life is all there is, and you are that. There is one consciousness. Consciousness is all there is, and you are that. All is One. You are that One, I am that One, All is that One. There is no separation.

Jeremy: I clearly see the transient nature of everything that is going on in this present moment. It really can't have a center. There have been moments of total quiet in the mind recently, and moments of loudness and ferocity. Some of the static is 'I don't get it' or 'why did I freak out' or 'how will my conversation with the landlord go' etcetera. Even though it's clear there is no one asking these questions. But the questions are unpleasant.

Right now all I know for sure is this completely untouchable, seemingly empty existence—the being. I can feel it. It's quite literally

a no-brainer. I don't know what life is. I don't know what non-duality is. I don't know what the universe or consciousness is, or death, or what 'everything' or 'nothing' means. I can't grasp that really—it has no substance for me.

All I know is that when thoughts are left alone there is peace. Then there's the thought that '*not* understanding' is somehow giving up, and I need to feel life is all of this and I am life or consciousness or the universe. Followed by another thought that I just have to throw it all out and let the train move on.

In writing this I see it can go on forever, enumerating the thoughts. But I think it's helpful to see these thoughts. At this point these thoughts seem to be really strong habits.



If you attach even to a trace
of this and that, of right and wrong,
the Mind-essence will be lost in confusion.
Although all dualities arise from the One,
do not be attached even to ideas of this One.
—Seng-ts'an –Third Chinese Patriarch

Enlightenment is the Problem Not the Solution

David: I sent an email to you a few months ago regarding non-duality. But, no matter what, I still can't see this. It seems very obvious right now that all there is, is awareness, and this is all there ever has been. Any thought of a person has been just that, a thought, and not a reality. However, in seeing this, there are no feelings of peace, and during everyday life the story continues, and so does the suffering.

I understand there is nothing to find so why is there a distinction between those who get this and those who don't? It seems when the mind sees itself as false, the story is automatically dropped (like the analogy of the snake being a rope). But no matter how many times it is seen that awareness is all there is, the story continues.

Stephen: What is your experience when you are suffering? Exactly what is happening? I can't find any entity here who is suffering, can you find one there? I find a series of stories revolving around an imaginary character called Stephen. I find no one real who is suffering. I find nothing but imaginary characters and an imaginary story of suffering. I find no real suffering or no real character who suffers. I believed I was suffering for twenty-five years, but I looked into this Stephen character, and I looked into what I was calling suffering, and I found nothing but imagination. What do you find?

David: I understand there is no one here just this presence of awareness, however, even though there is no real central character to these stories, when they come up, the body responds creating physical pain and resistance. I have looked countless times and see nothing but this consciousness with a lot of pain in it which takes the joy out of life. Maybe I am only seeing this on the surface level and it needs to be seen on a deeper level that there is only consciousness?

Stephen: Suffering is all imaginary, isn't it? If there is no story playing in your head, can there be any suffering? You don't have to (nor can you) get rid of the stories that are playing in your head. You just notice all the stories are imaginary, and all suffering is based on the imaginary character, David, who is the star of the stories.

There is no such thing as suffering, no one who can suffer. There's no such thing as enlightenment and no one who can be enlightened. It's all imagination. There's nothing deeper than that.

Are you really suffering, or is that, too, a story playing of David, the poor, suffering man? And someday David will be enlightened! It really is this simple—just seeing David and his suffering are imaginary. Then if the stories continue to play in the head, to whom does it matter? Just watch the stories—so what!

David: I understand that suffering is imaginary, but knowing it conceptually isn't enough. I feel I am missing something, or I have not seen this in the right way. People who get this seem to immediately become very peaceful and talk about having a sense that everything is one. And they are able to preach this to other people from first hand experience, where I would have to refer to other's texts to explain this to people. Am I reading too deep into this, or is there some final understanding?

Stephen: Well, either suffering is imaginary or it's not. Is your suffering imaginary? Don't agree conceptually—consider your own experience. Is there any suffering for you when there is no imaginary story playing in your head? Seeing that for yourself is not a conceptual understanding—it's an experiential or non-conceptual recognition that nothing can trouble you but imagination.

In your own direct experience you see that if you feel you are suffering, then you know there's a story playing about David—David is not good enough, David doesn't get it, David is... you know the story!

All the talk you're hearing from other people is part of the story that's playing in your head. Other people get this, and I don't. Other people know all is one and are free of suffering, and I am not. What's wrong with me?

Look in your own experience. Is suffering imaginary? What am I in essence? Can I really suffer, or is that an imaginary story playing in my head? What am I really? Am I this simple consciousness that is watching these stories play before me? Am I David or is David a character in the play I'm watching?

Trying to improve David and his experience, trying to free David of his suffering, trying to make David become enlightened, peaceful and free, hoping to get what others seemingly have—all of that is the problem. There is no real problem other than the solution! The solution

implies a problem that doesn't exist, and someone who can attain the resolution to suffering, enlightenment or some other conceptual nonsense.

All there is—check this for yourself—is this consciousness right now, right now, right now. Everything else is imagination. See if that's true—don't accept it or reject it. It is this simple.

[Follow up a few days later]

David: Today there was a seeing for the first time that consciousness is all there is! Everything was so hilarious—the searching, the belief there was a separate person—what a joke! It was only a temporary seeing, however, now it is known that even though the feeling of being an individual may come back, there is only ever consciousness! Thank you for helping me see this.



I am always with all beings
I abandon no one.
However great your inner darkness
You are never separate from me.

Let your thoughts flow past you calmly
Keep me near at every moment
Trust me with your life, because I
Am you, more than you yourself are.
—**Bhagavad Gita**

Not Just a Cute Spiritual Metaphor

Cameron: I thought I should keep in touch and let you know how things have been unfolding (seemingly) for me. The past two weeks were tremendously euphoric (as I'm sure you noticed in my last correspondence). Basically the very blissful bodily experience, of course, subsided. Once it left there was some anxiety and scrambling to get it back and to try to 'do' what I did before, which is obviously a mistaken presumption based on the notion that there was someone who had done something before! Anyway, after much frustration and then a somewhat melodramatic giving up moment, everything settled down nicely and now there is just this very simple, ordinary way of being—just as I am always.

It has been interesting to watch this because there really was this belief that there was someone who needed to do something, you know, to sustain or continue it or something. So it's been interesting to see I can actually forget about the understanding altogether—and everything still is just fine as it is. There is no need to actively think about it or anything, which as I write this I know sounds silly—but that is the classic me story “gotta be non-dual today! I am non-dual Cameron after all,” but that's all rubbish.

It just is everything. And sometimes during the day something will happen or someone will say something and it will just pop into my head “Oh! She thinks she is someone.” Or weirder stuff like the other day it dawned on me there is no difference between animate and inanimate objects—these are just words that make my is-ness seem different, for example, to a rock or a tree.

And of course this really means there can be no death, or life for that matter—it's all this fluid sameness. Oh, yeah, and my favorite one—I used to think that 'now' was this spot where I was that somehow moved along the timeline, but its so obvious that it's all now. I know it's been said in all the books and everything. But it's so, well, literal. Just now, that's all there ever was. It's almost silly to call it 'now' because it has nothing to do with time and what people perceive as time is just this bubbling of energy called trees, and rocks and Cameron right here out of this supposed 'now'. Well, I guess I am preaching to the choir here but its fun to write about it anyway.

One question though: 'Just watch'—does this require effort? Or is 'Just watch' what we are already are, and hence it requires no effort?

Stephen: You may notice there is no such thing as effort. And there is no separate person who exerts effort. Thoughts happen and sometimes actions follow: Whose thoughts are they? Whose effort is it? Is there any separate entity there who has thoughts, and exerts effort?

Does a pine tree make an effort to produce pine cones? Does a dog make an effort to bark? Does the wind make an effort to blow? You are awareness. Is there any effort required to be awareness, or is awareness simply happening?

The suggestion to 'just watch' is given to act as a pacifier for a busy mind that wants to know, "What do I do? What happened to my bliss? How can I get it back? How can I avoid these disturbing thoughts?" The answer is nothing needs to be done. Bliss happens. Disturbing thoughts happen. Peace happens.

Believing there is a separate entity who needs to do something about his experience, and trying to change the experience is at the root of suffering.

The suggestion to 'just watch' acts as a pacifier to the mind, and takes you out of the story of a suffering 'me' and helps you notice that you are the awareness that is watching the show—not the imaginary, suffering 'me'.

Cameron: In order to resolve some of my final doubts I have been spending the last two days trying to articulate to myself how I understand things—in the most reduced, pithy way, in order to pinpoint where these doubts are coming from. This is where I am—perhaps by explicating it like this you can point out the doubt's source: It's undeniably clear to me that what we are is this uncaused peace, and this is our empty awareness. This is always available in the sense that we are it, yet suffering happens when we believe that instead of this knowing nothingness, we are a fixed person. So when I reduce it on a tangible level it's about an uncaused peace which is indestructible and untouchable by changing conditions whether they are external or imaginary. When I am confident that I am this uncaused peace, nothing that the character does or says, or anything that happens to that character is such a big deal anymore because fundamentally this peace is certain one-hundred percent.

On the other hand there is psychological suffering which comes down to believing that, instead of peace being the essential, irrevocable aspect of your own being, you are a separate thing that must go out and find peace in other separate things 'out there'—from this point of view

peace is not what you *are* but something that you can get and lose, based on circumstances.

So, it seems to me the possibility of suffering comes in when the 'I' sense arises strongly enough to make you believe that, indeed, the peace you are is *out there* and has been tampered with—to make you believe you have lost it somehow.

My doubt is this: It seems to me that because you have no control over what happens, including the arising of the 'I' sense, your peace is contingent on whether or not the 'I' arises. This makes me question whether I have seen through it completely. Because although I feel a deep conviction that there is no one at all, and I feel entirely at ease at this moment, there is this nagging threat the habitual patterning of the 'I' sense will arise and then no amount of non-dual understanding will change the fact that I am suffering based on that 'I' arising strongly enough to make me think the story is true.

It seems to me you are either buying the illusion or seeing the truth. And if there is the possibility of suffering, for whatever reason (other than basic physical pain), the 'I' is still lingering, then the truth has not been seen fully.

Stephen: In your own direct experience, what's happening when psychological suffering is happening? Isn't thinking happening? Thinking about Cameron? Usually a story is playing in the head, and, of course, the central character in the story is Cameron.

Is there *ever* any psychological suffering when there is no story playing? Of course not! If there is no story playing in the head, there is no psychological suffering. Another name for the stories playing in the head is imagination. So, isn't it clear that all psychological suffering is based on imagination?

Sometimes the imaginary stories create an uncomfortable energy in the body, and we call this process psychological suffering. So psychological suffering is nothing more than imagination and an uncomfortable energy in the body. What do you do when disturbing stories are playing and uncomfortable energy is flowing through the body? You watch. Nothing needs to be done.

You are the witnessing presence. You witness the pleasant stories and the unpleasant. You witness the pleasurable sensations and the unpleasant. You may notice there really is no such thing as psychological suffering. To say you are suffering psychologically is just another story playing and you watch it.

You are the witnessing presence that is aware of the words on this screen right now. You are awareness right now. This witnessing presence that you are was never suffering, and will never be enlightened. This witnessing presence that you are right now watches the stories of Cameron and his suffering, and Cameron with his hopes of enlightenment. This witnessing presence cannot suffer, and it cannot attain enlightenment.

So, again, what do you do about the suffering stories of Cameron? You watch. And you know the stories are only imaginary. All psychological suffering is imaginary. The imaginary stories are free to come and go. You remain as the witnessing presence.

You may notice that all doubts are merely conceptual nonsense appearing in this present awareness. What to do? Nothing—just watch.

Cameron: To be honest, I am not sure this response goes to the heart of my question. It's clear that we are this witnessing presence, and the witnessing presence essentially doesn't suffer. However, if the ego story is still able to generate enough energy to get its hooks in, then there is suffering. And since we are down to basics here—the question is, is there psychological suffering or isn't there? It seems to me that witnessing is inevitable because we are the witness, even if it witnesses suffering.

My point is, if suffering is arising in the story it's because the 'I' illusion hasn't been seen through, otherwise, what would happen is—up would come conditions that normally amount to suffering, and a simple witnessing from peace would occur, because one is certain that the story is untrue.

If you believe in the story with the fixed, solidified self-entity then there is suffering. To say one should 'just watch' is all good and well, but what we are doing is watching suffering, and believe me I have been a Buddhist for many years and made it my business to watch that suffering really closely.

What I am interested in is seeing through the 'I' thought completely, so that when it arises strongly, I can stay firmly with the peace of my witnessing presence, firm in the knowledge of its fiction. If this 'I' patterning has the power to rise up and (seemingly) occlude the peace of awareness then this has not been done, has it?

Sorry, if I am getting difficult but this seems to be the axis on which all my doubts spin. If this is getting too involved for email discussion and you would prefer to chat on the phone (and have time

do so) I would be happy to make a call at a convenient time in the future—maybe hearing it from a voice will fill the missing gap.

Stephen: Yes, I am happy to talk on the phone. Do you see that all psychological suffering is based in imagination? Do you see that even the story that I was suffering, I am suffering, or I may be suffering is also based in imagination? Do you see that your story (and mine) describing the process of psychological suffering is based in imagination? Describing the process of suffering was helpful to this point. Now see that it was all a story, all imagination.

There is no such thing as psychological suffering outside of thought or imagination. There is no such thing as enlightenment outside of thought or imagination. There is no separate entity called Cameron outside of thought or imagination. If you believe that psychological suffering was real in the past, then it can return and be real again in the future. But was it *ever* real? Or was it thought-based and imaginary? You may notice you really don't know what psychological suffering is, or if it has any reality.

If you see that suffering is all thought-based and imaginary, but still want to change the story—that is the dream character trying to control the dream. There is no separate Cameron creating or controlling the stories. See the dream story of suffering as a dream and just watch it.

There is no such thing as psychological suffering. There is no such thing as Cameron. So how can Cameron do anything about psychological suffering? These words are literal, and are not just a cute spiritual metaphor. All dreams are free to come and go through you including the dreams of suffering, and the dreams of freedom from suffering. They are all dreams.

Just watch. And *you have no idea* what you're watching! This *watching* that we are is absolutely clueless! It doesn't differentiate between suffering and peace. Knowing suffering from peace is mind-stuff. Suffering and freedom from suffering are both mind-stuff, and imaginary. This witnessing presence that we are is the only constant, the only reality.

Cameron: I have been letting this sink in, and I think I believed that in the 'occluded' state the suffering is real. What I am hearing you say is that suffering is not real, and you can't do anything to stop it from coming and going. You see, I think that's the thing. I was subtly expecting something that would have no suffering in the sense that the story would be free of suffering.

That's it! I have no control over the story—even the suffering, it's not me. I can't stop it because it's not my business. I am simply the *seeing*. I have been thinking that my 'understanding' is in the story, and that it will change the story somehow. Wow, I can't stop the suffering, and I can't get free—it's all in the story. I think I am getting it. Let's talk on the telephone to make sure I'm getting this straight.

[After a phone conversation]

Cameron: Thanks for the chat. I see now what you were pointing out about this presence having nothing to do with thoughts about suffering or the blissful sensations. When you said the awareness that we are has no idea about suffering or peace, it clicked that it's just a complete openness that lets anything happen and it's always been here because things always just happen anyway.



Bondage and Liberation are creations of Maya, superimpositions upon the Brahman imagined by the mind without any existence in reality. The scriptures even proclaim aloud: “There is in truth no creation and no destruction; no one is bound, no one is seeking Liberation, no one is on the way to Deliverance. There are none Liberated. This is the absolute truth.”

—Shankara

Everything is Self-Perfected in This

Cameron: I just want to let you know the pointing out was so clear last time there seems to be this entirely stable clarity now. The clincher was when you pointed out that even when the sense of ‘I’ and ‘doing’ arise there still is no one doing even that. It’s complete freedom. It’s so simple. It really just is *this*. Thoughts are being thought, sensations are happening in the body, but there is no one—just this luminous present.

Strangely, far from being detached, all the thoughts and emotions are so vivid. But it’s like this raw energy. Even when my mind is very discursive and there are what seem to be negative stories, it’s like the discursiveness is this torrent of energy and I really enjoy it. In my life situation I am going through a very stressful time of year, but there is just this vivid sense of being. And the more intense things get the more beautiful it seems.

As a Buddhist I used to often chant “Everything is self-perfected in the Dharmadatu (Sphere of Reality)” and never get it. I thought the Dharmadatu was this cool place you see when you are enlightened. Now I see what it means. It’s astonishing.

Stephen: Yes, that’s it exactly. Your description reminds me of Nisargadatta’s description of this:

“It is solid, steady, changeless, beginning-less and endless, ever new, ever fresh.

“This reality is so concrete, so actual, so much more tangible than mind and matter, that compared to it, even a diamond is soft like butter. This overwhelming actuality makes the world dreamlike, misty, irrelevant.

“To me nothing ever happens. There is something changeless, motionless, immovable, rock-like, unassailable; a solid mass of pure being-consciousness-bliss. I am never out of it. Nothing can take me out of it, no torture, no calamity.

“My world is free from opposites, of mutually destructive discrepancies; harmony pervades; its peace is rocklike; this peace and silence are my body.

“My condition is absolutely steady. Whatever I may do, it stays like a rock—motionless. Once you have awakened into reality, you stay in it. It is self-evident and yet beyond description.”

Cameron, he’s describing *your* natural state, *my* natural state, *our* natural state. So many years struggling to discover this simplicity that was always here—I am this. It all makes sense now. So simple.



O grace abounding that had made me fit
to fix my eyes on the eternal light
until my vision was consumed in it!

I saw within its depth how it conceives
all things in a single volume bound by Love,
of which the universe is the scattered leaves;

Substance, accident, and their relation
so fused that all I say could do no more
than yield a glimpse of that bright revelation.

I think I saw the universal form
that binds these things, for as I speak these words
I feel my joy swell and my spirits warm.

—Dante

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—Nisargadatta Maharaj from *I AM THAT*

The spiritual traditions point to the fact that at the root of all seeking and suffering is the sense of being separate—separate from our fellow man, separate from God, separate from all of creation. And the end of all spiritual seeking and psychological suffering comes when we see that we're *not* separate, there is no separate person here.

When these fundamental pointers are seen clearly, then psychological suffering and spiritual seeking fall away—and we awaken to the dream.

—Stephen Wingate

Stephen's dialogues on the truth of who we are, are consistently direct and to the point. He returns again and again to the important themes of clarifying our identity and resolving the root cause of suffering. While these themes are universal and form the essential message of Nisargadatta Maharaj and 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, Stephen has cast them in his own unique voice. He puts them across with a freshness and clarity that make the message very accessible to a contemporary seeker.

—Foreword by John Wheeler - Author of *Awakening to the Natural State*

Stephen points with clarity to the obvious, but oft overlooked extraordinary/ordinary sense of beingness at the core of what we are. His words flow from the Single Source to which they point back; gently yet firm, free of false promises or spiritual mumbo-jumbo. In these talks there is a constant underlying acknowledgment of the absolute non-duality of all things, including that of the reader and the author.

—Leo Hartong - Author of *Awakening to the Dream*

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