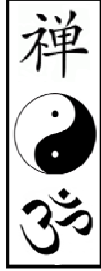


**The Outrageous Myths
of Enlightenment**

Stephen Wingate



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Preface

My intense search for Peace started in my early twenties and lasted for over twenty years. The desire to know and experience the truth that the ancient traditions were pointing to led me down many paths. I studied most of the Eastern and Western religious philosophies and some of the non-mainstream approaches as well. I felt a strong resonance with the non-dual philosophies as presented in Christian Mysticism, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Advaita-Vedanta.

In 1998 I discovered the book *I AM THAT* by Nisargadatta Maharaj and began reading it. Immediately there was an intuitive, powerfully intense feeling that this man understands the truth that the ancient traditions were pointing to, and more importantly, he was *living* this truth! His words are alive and struck me to the core of my being. I had to come to this understanding myself, somehow, somehow.

After years of reading and re-reading the book, I felt I had a strong intellectual understanding of the truth that Nisargadatta was pointing to, but it wasn't my *living* experience. This led to a sense of terrible frustration. I felt I needed to find someone who was living this truth and was able to help me make it my daily, living experience.

In 2004 I learned of a man called 'Sailor' Bob Adamson from Australia who was a student of Nisargadatta Maharaj and who has been helping others come to the understanding for over twenty-nine years. Bob led me to his student, John Wheeler, from Santa Cruz, California who was also sharing this message in the same tradition. I met John Wheeler in 2004. Through this meeting and our conversations that followed, the intellectual understanding has become my living experience.

After more than twenty years of struggling and searching for Peace, the seeking has come to an end. I am thankful to Nisargadatta Maharaj, 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, and John Wheeler who pointed me to the Peace that I already was and always have been.

Stephen Wingate
Boston, Massachusetts, USA
June 2006

Foreword

This book provides a wealth of extremely clear, direct and practical pointers that lay bare the root causes of our suffering, and point the way to life free of psychological suffering. With insight, clarity, patience, compassion and humor, Stephen reminds us again and again that the only thing that can cause us suffering is thinking and imagination based on our presumed existence as separate individuals.

As he clearly shows, one's true nature is not a separate individual at all. There is no controlling entity behind our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and actions. In direct looking, we discover ourselves to be that clear, open and spacious presence of awareness in which all appearances spontaneously arise and set.

Stephen has a wonderful gift of sharing these insights, which are based on his own clear and solid experience. His words carry the fragrance of peace and clarity to which they point. The writings and dialogues in this book will undermine any residual doubts, questions and caveats raised by the mind and leave you in your natural state of joyful awareness.

John Wheeler

Introduction

What are Self-realization, Awakening, Liberation, and Enlightenment?

You are the One Self, Awareness Itself. Stop for a moment right now, and notice the presence of awareness that you are—here and now. Notice that you are spacious, open, awake and free. Notice that these words are arising in this spacious openness that you are. Notice that all of the activities of the mind, the seeking and suffering, the resistance and attachments, the stories and dramas all play out in you—this spacious, open presence of awareness.

This peaceful, loving, spacious openness is what you are. This spacious openness is the Self, the Liberation, the Awakening, the Enlightenment, the Peace and the Love for which you've been seeking. You have always been, and always will be simply THIS.

It's apparent that you already are this witnessing presence; you are the Self. You know this from your own direct experience. Everywhere you go; there you are as this witnessing presence. Right now you are this freedom, this liberation, this awakening, this enlightenment. There is nothing mystical about your presence as awareness—you just are. Notice it now.

There can be a tendency to 'spiritualize' or 'mystify' this simple presence of awareness that is always here and now, especially after having what could be called life-changing experiences, realizations and epiphanies. You are always this simple witnessing presence. Sometimes you witness what seem to be mystical experiences, and other times the mundane, but you are always this simple witnessing presence—peaceful and free.

All there is, is This—there's nothing else.

There's nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to become.

This is all there is.

All there ever was is This.

All there ever will be is This.

There is nothing else—just This.

Nothing mystical. Nothing mundane.

Just This.

And You are This.

My interest in communicating this message is to de-mystify the concepts of Awakening, Liberation, Self-realization, and Enlightenment. And to share the fact that it's possible to be free of psychological suffering, and free of spiritual seeking.

My approach is to share my direct experience, and to speak from the heart about what I have found to be true. And I'm finding that those who stop for a moment, consider the suggestions offered, and apply them to their own direct experience are finding themselves free of psychological suffering and spiritual seeking.

You may notice that the message being shared here is shockingly simple. And possibly for that reason, those who have keenly developed intellects tend to overlook the obvious, and continue exercising their intellect with never-ending questions, doubts, and 'Yes, buts!' So the appearance of suffering and seeking goes on.

If you stop for a few moments and look to your own direct experience for the answers, you may be surprised how quickly and easily psychological suffering and spiritual seeking come to an end. If your interest is in being free of psychological suffering and free of the outrageous myths of enlightenment, then look to your own direct experience for answers to the fundamental questions posed here. It is this simple.

Being free of psychological suffering and spiritual seeking does not require years of spiritual practice, meditation, faith, trust, understanding of complex religious philosophies, or a keenly developed intellect. Psychological suffering and your spiritual search come to an end by seeing in your own direct experience that what you are in essence is simply awareness, and that nothing can trouble you but imagination.

Stephen Wingate

Part I Writings

1

Bottom Line: How Does This Work?

There is nothing mystical or magical about this. It is simple, logical and applicable to everyone. This is not just for special beings who were able to transcend their earthly fetters, and rise above the lowly egoic peasantry through years of self-sacrifice and meditation. That's all nonsense. This is true for anyone and everyone. These words apply to you and to me:

'We are free here and now, it is only the mind that imagines bondage. Seeing that there is no such thing as a permanent, separate person, all becomes clear. You are the immensity and infinity of consciousness. It is lucid, silent, peaceful, alert, and unafraid—without desire and fear. To realize this is the end of all seeking'.

Nisargadatta Maharaj

These few words say it all. Let's break them down.

1. *'We are free here and now, it is only the mind that imagines bondage'.*

Is this true? Consider your own experience. When you are sitting quietly, not thinking about yourself and your problems, can anything trouble you? Can there be any bondage if you are not imagining yourself to be bound? Of course you are free here and now! Nisargadatta puts it another way, too: *'Nothing can trouble you but your own imagination'*. There is no such thing as bondage. It is merely a concept!

2. *'Seeing that there is no such thing as a permanent, separate person, all becomes clear'.*

Is this true? Look for yourself. What is the common denominator in all of your suffering, all of your problems? What is at the center of your life situation? What is this 'me' that says, 'my' life, 'my' problems? If it is seen that there is no separate me, no separate person here at all, can there be any suffering? The 'me' who was bound and

suffering is just imagination. Reading the words and agreeing or disagreeing is not enough. Seeing this for yourself is the key.

3. *'You are the immensity and infinity of consciousness. It is lucid, silent, peaceful, alert, and unafraid—without desire and fear'.*

If I am not the separate person I thought I was then what am I? Isn't consciousness your essential nature? If you are not conscious can anything else exist? Can there be a 'me' and 'my' story if consciousness is not there to witness it? What is the nature of pure consciousness? Isn't it clear, silent, peaceful, alert, unafraid? So consciousness is what you are: not a separate person.

4. *'To realize this is the end of all seeking'.*

For what are you seeking? Aren't you seeking for clarity, peace, freedom from desire and fear? Aren't these the characteristics of consciousness? You are what you are seeking! Realizing that you are consciousness, not the separate person you imagined yourself to be, the seeking comes to an end and you are free!

When these words are understood and known as the truth they become your daily living experience. It's as simple as it looks. There's nothing magical or mystical about it. There is no need for any mystical experience of universal love and union. The understanding brings on a simple experience of Peace and well-being that is felt as the common ground of all your daily experiences. Happiness and sadness, laughter and tears, anger and joy: all come and go in this awareness of peace and well-being. Nothing to gain. Nothing to lose. Everything is as it is.

Part II Correspondence & Dialogues

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Egoic Interactions and Confrontations

Question: What effect does this understanding have on one's relationships? Isn't it difficult to relate to someone who is caught up in the ego when you are free of that?

Stephen: It's much more difficult for two egos to relate. The egoic experience is one of insecurity, lack, and fear. Believing yourself to be an individual ego, your relationships are fundamentally insecure, lacking and fearful. Knowing yourself as pure awareness and not a separate ego, your relationship with everyone and everything changes.

Q: But isn't it frustrating to interact with others who are completely caught up in their ego? Don't you feel like you're being pulled into egoic interactions and confrontations?

S: This realization reveals the fact that everything is happening, and that there is no one who is doing anything. Even the ego, which is the personal sense of doer-ship, is just happening. Does the ego create the ego? Seeing that there is no one in control here in me, it is also seen that there is no one in control in the other. Who is confronting whom? All interactions and confrontations are the Source interacting with and confronting itself.

Along with this is a sense of acceptance of whatever is happening. There is no one here accepting things, but there is a sense of acceptance. Confrontational interactions arise and fall: awareness remains pure, peaceful, and unaffected.

Love and Intimate Relationships

Question: I've heard and read that our natural state of awareness can also be called love. Can you expand upon this?

Stephen: The presence of awareness with the absence of 'me' is love.

Q: Is the absence of me required for there to be love? Can't love be experienced in personal, intimate relationships?

S: Love is the essence of all existence. Love is the natural state of all being. All there is, is love. Without love, nothing is. Love is not personal. There is no 'my' love or 'your' love: there is just love.

Q: How is love experienced on a personal level in intimate relationships? Surely, there must be a 'you' and a 'me' to know and experience love!

S: When two are involved in a personal relationship there are times when the sense of 'you' and 'me' (ego) falls away in each person. In the absence of the sense of 'you' and 'me' there is love. This is the sense of peace, joy, and blissful oneness for which we're all longing: it's our natural state. When the sense of ego arises again, the natural state of love is personalized by the mind and claimed as a personal experience of the ego. The two egos then assume that the other is the source of their love. This, of course, leads to fear of loss, jealousy and a host of other painful emotions.

Q: That makes sense, but I don't 'love' everyone. There is a special sense of love I have for my partner. Aren't there different types of love?

S: On a personal level, there are different types of relationships, and there can be a special attraction between partners based on biological and psychological compatibility. But there are not different types of love or a special love. Love is the essence of all being; it's absolute, unconditional, and impersonal.

Q: How will this recognition help me with my personal relationships?

S: Knowing yourself as pure awareness and not a separate ego, there is the recognition that your essential nature is love. You are what you have always been seeking. You don't need anyone or anything to fill the sense of emptiness, loneliness, and separation that is the egoic experience. The fear of loss, jealousy, and other painful emotions that are the essence of egoic relationships fall away. You are able to truly enjoy the beauty of all human relationships in complete freedom, love, and peace. Love is your natural state.

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Something Strange is Happening Here!

Question: I want to share with you what's been happening here. I've seen clearly that I do take myself to be a controlling entity. And I've been seeing that every time I feel this resistance and emptiness the 'doer' is always there focusing like hell, trying to make something happen. I've been asking myself, 'Do I really have the power to do anything?' I'm seeing that I haven't got much power. It seems that I'm just imagining that I'm doing things. It reminds me of Nisargadatta's statement that goes something like this, 'Stop imagining you are this or that, or you are doing this or that'. I was sitting down here just a few moments ago pondering over the sense of being the doer, the controller, or the ego.

And there came a point where there was so much space that I didn't know if I had fallen asleep or where I was or what I was. I simply was lost in being, I suppose. Something very strange is happening with me here. This spaciousness is what I am, right? Just pure being, and in this pure being there is no experience of being anybody at all.

Stephen: Your essence is pure being, awareness, and it is the witnessing presence of what is. You're noticing that your essence is just like space. Awareness has a spacious and peaceful quality with an absence of resistance. The resistance that arises is the sense of being in control of what comes into awareness. Resistance is the sense of being a separate, controlling entity, an ego. The resistance can come and go in you. You are awareness, spacious and free. Even the resistance, which is the sense of being a separate, controlling entity, is free to come and go. It is no problem. You are the spacious awareness that

knows no boundaries.

You did not create the thoughts, feelings, sensations or the sense of ego. They all arise in you, spacious awareness. The world is in you. You are not in the world. Your body is in you. You are not in the body.

73

The Pointers Found Fertile Ground

Question: Well, all of this is getting funnier and funnier. Not funny when you think *you* are at the wheel. Very funny when it's seen there's *no one* at the wheel. And how to explain that this is happening? Well, it's just like the pointers found fertile ground and are blossoming in emptiness. That sounds profound—who wrote that? But really, this process has a life of it's own now and 'I' am stepping aside and watching the show. Sometimes delusion arises, but the delusion doesn't really bite, and there's no sense of control, blame or praise. All is seen as phantom ideas occurring in aware emptiness. And once again, the ever present—Thank you!!

Stephen: Thank you for sharing your experience. I enjoy hearing from you. Well, today it's been about two weeks hasn't it? It may sound odd, but it seems that two weeks is more than enough time to see in one's own direct experience that there is no separate ego here, no me, no entity with any power or control over one's life experience. Two weeks is enough time to see that life is happening now, and always has been happening. Two weeks to see that all we know for certain is that consciousness is, and the source of everything that arises in consciousness is an absolute mystery. Two weeks to see that we are absolutely powerless, and completely clueless! And life goes on—it's all a mystery. So what's next? Who knows? I have no idea! Thank you for sharing your experience with this. I'm happy to correspond with you as life unfolds.

Q: Actually, I gave myself ten days, and it was on about the ninth day that the 'I' was seen through. The rest since then has been a clean up of flotsam and jetsam thrown out into awareness by habit of mind. You helped me to see through that phantom of the opera show as well. The phantom may come back and say, 'Boo', but it's just an appearance.

Looking back, I can see that when my teacher asked me, 'What if

you drop all that, and tell me what's here *now*?' I looked, saw and said, 'Nothing'. It was seen then. That was in 2001 at a retreat with him. So now it's 2005 and that 'nothing' is finally really seen as all there is: nothing seeing itself as everything.

I just love your metaphor of a friend walking along the spiritual path in the desert with you and points out that the lake is just a mirage. Thank you, dear friend. Tears are welling up again. Tears of gratitude, peace, sweetness, love.

74

A Grenade Has Gone Off in the Brain!

Question: I want to share with you more strange things that are happening. Before, I felt that I was a somebody, a separate, thinking, choosing entity with power. And then some people like yourself and others pointed out that this 'me' has no power to do anything. I am aware, I see things happening, and the question arises, 'did the *me* think that thought? And, I was walking, was the *me* doing the walking? Sensations are happening, am I making them happen?' I can see it's an innocent misunderstanding that the me-image is the doer.

And now I find myself losing all interest in meetings, books, and gaining knowledge. Even the need to meditate is dropping off, almost without notice. The idea arises, 'I need to meditate, I need something', but then it passes. I have no idea what's happening, or not happening. It's like a grenade has gone off in the brain. I feel normal again and it feels good. I feel like enjoying life, partying and having fun! Oh my God, how many years have been wasted in chasing so much nonsense! To hell with the story of me! Thank you.

Stephen: Yes! Reading, meditating and all of that will not get you anywhere. If you feel like meditating, then go ahead, it's fine; but it won't give you anything more than going for a walk. If you feel like reading, then go ahead and read. You don't need to do anything to be free—you are already free. There are no real problems, just imagination. Everything comes and goes, happiness and sadness, laughter and tears, so what? It's no problem; everything passes. No one can do anything for you. You don't need anyone or anything. Everything is fine the way it is right now, right now, and right now. It's always right now. That's it, there's nothing more.

You Can't Wake Up—You Were Never Asleep

Question: Well, I've really gotten some mileage today from the thing you wrote me about the seeing and hearing not being mine. There just keeps being no one doing anything. There keeps being nothing to do, nothing to change. There keeps being no person doing the seeing that I see. Finishing this job may come faster than I thought!

Stephen: You're seeing and realizing in your own direct experience that life is happening, but to no one. So, if no one is here *now* doing the seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, and acting; was there *ever* anyone here doing any of it?

What is it about you that has never changed? What is it about you that is here now? What is it about you that was never asleep? What is it about you that never woke up? You are awareness. You can't wake up—you were never asleep! A dream happened in which Amanda was the writer, producer, and director of her life. The dream is seen to be a dream, and it's over. The dream may appear again, but now you know that a dream is a dream. There is a witnessing presence that watches all dreams, and you are that presence. It's not your presence; it's the impersonal sense of awareness that witnesses the personal experience of Amanda as her life unfolds. Everything is happening, but to no one. Consciousness is—period! There's nothing left to do, and there's no one left to do it.

—Follow up a day later—

Q: I think the end is in sight. All day long today, there has just been doing happening. What is going on is fresh, and not connected to anything else, and so there's no story that brings any emotional reaction.

One thing I think is very strange about this is that it's so bizarre that how could you ever teach this to anyone? There could never be a religion that says, 'You aren't anyone at all', because no one would join. And yet it's the only truth. It just struck me as odd that the truth is something very few people will actually believe. Once you buy into it, the rest is, I think, inevitable.

S: Nothing to buy, nothing to sell. Everything is as it is.

Singing to the Choir: The Bullshit Song

Question: I want to be really open about what's happening here with me. I have not completely settled in with all of this. Some of the same old problems are coming back up. There is this 'me' that's looking for the uncaused joy. And I'm trying to stay with present-awareness.

Apparently, if there's any dissatisfaction, the 'me' isn't quite kicked out yet. Maybe it's the momentum of the 'me' still making itself known. Or we could say it's awakening, and not full liberation yet. We'll see.

Stephen: I know I'm singing to the choir, but all your problems are bullshit. Nothing can trouble you but your own imagination. It doesn't matter what bullshit comes back up; bullshit is bullshit. Bullshit has always been bullshit, and always will be bullshit. So what? The whole story of awakening and liberation and suffering is bullshit. Do you believe your own bullshit? I don't believe your bullshit, or my bullshit, it's all the same bullshit.

You will never wake up. You'll never be liberated. You were never asleep. It's all bullshit. Consciousness is consciousness. Imagination is imagination. Bullshit is bullshit. Flush the bullshit down the toilet, and what's left?

Q: Nothing! What a great ride! Now I'm having this subtle joy arising in the bullshit!

I Can Feel That This is Working

Question: I think my intellectual understanding of this is getting clearer. I find it strange how soon I seem to have understood it. I feel a strong sense like I'm understanding it, and knowing what it is. I feel it is non-conceptual because I don't have to think about it, I feel it all the time. I know that even though I'm not thinking of it, it's here. Is it possible to understand the fundamentals of non-duality so soon?

Stephen: How long does it take to realize that your essential nature is awareness? You stop for a moment and recognize the fact that

consciousness is, and I Am That. And how long does it take to realize the fact that you do not create thoughts, feelings, sensations and actions that arise in awareness; and that you can't possibly exist as a separate ego who has power to exercise his own will? You just look and see in your own direct experience, and you've seen the fundamentals of non-duality. Consciousness is all there is, and I Am That.

Q: And is there no way to practice in order to keep this knowledge in shape? I mean is it possible to see it and then forget about the whole deal? Isn't it necessary to have some reminder to avoid going into the thoughts and the feelings?

S: Your essential nature is consciousness, and you've seen that. Thoughts and feelings arise in you, and they pass. Your essential nature remains unchanged as thoughts, feelings, and sensations come and go. This understanding is a non-conceptual understanding or seeing of these fundamental facts. No practice is necessary, just noticing or seeing the fundamentals.

Q: Would you say that this awareness is the same as The Atman, God and Tao?

S: Whatever words we use are not it. You can use whatever words you like based on your own direct experience.

Q: This awareness is not in the body? Or is it something that manifests and connects to the body?

S: Awareness is not in or out. It is omni-directional. It cannot be located.

Q: I'm getting some idea like this awareness is what gives all the living things ability to move.

S: Awareness is all there is.

Q: I'm very fond of this philosophy of non-duality. And come to think of it, I'm learning psychology, and have been very curious about how non-duality can be used for psychotherapy. I read about some people who are using the concepts of non-duality in their practice. Do you

know how that goes? And does it work well? I'm very curious about that.

S: This philosophy seems to be useful and effective in all areas of living: psychology, philosophy and general daily living.

Q: I can feel that this is working; the main thing I've noticed is the boost of my confidence, that's very great. I'm also very happy about how my social skills have risen after this understanding. I think that's some sign. Also I have lost all of the intense spiritual seeking that had been causing me a lot of pain because I thought I had to act in certain ways according to some scriptures. That caused some conflicts in me.

S: Very good. Life is simple and easy when we realize that life is happening, and there is no need or benefit in fighting life as it's happening. There's the simple sense that nothing's wrong anymore.

92

Your Search is Done

Question: I've been studying non-duality rather intensively for about two years now. I've been reading web pages, books, and listening to tapes. I feel that I have a solid intellectual understanding of what is pointed to, and there have been times (few) when the seeking has stopped. But then I get doubtful, and the seeking goes on.

Stephen: What are your doubts?

Q: I think there is still some ego left that is not seen through. One of my latest discoveries was that there was a subtle believing that I was something special. I was so well cooked in that subtle belief that I overlooked it.

S: Is there a problem with the sense of ego? The belief that you are something special is the ego itself, isn't it? So if the sense of being the ego comes and goes, is it a problem? Does the ego have any real power, or does it just appear so? What are you in essence? Are you the ego, or are you awareness? The ego comes and goes. Does awareness

come and go? Which one are you? Speak from your own direct experience, and what answers come up?

Q: Mostly I answer my questions myself by thinking and looking, but it would be very nice to discuss these matters with another person as I sometimes feel that I am driving in a circle.

S: Yes, it can be helpful to share your experience with another. Communicating like this helps to clarify what you know and see in your own direct experience. It helps to clear away the clouds of doubt, and to recognize that which is always present and aware.

Q: Today I have the idea that I have to be aware of awareness all the time. When or if this happens, it is done?

S: You are awareness. You can't be aware of awareness—you are it. The phrase, 'be aware of awareness' is a pointer to help bring your attention to awareness itself, and away from the objects of awareness. When it is seen that your essential nature is awareness, and that the ego is a temporary and powerless appearance in awareness, it is done. There's nothing to do. Everything is happening—to no one.

Q: Lately, much of my attention is busy with another rather compelling part of the play of life, and looking into the questions of 'what I am, and what I am not' has less attention.

S: Everywhere you go, there you are as awareness. Your attention may be focused on your family matters, your relationships, your career, or your spiritual search; but you are always there as the witnessing presence. It's not necessary to focus your attention on the questions of self-inquiry; just see that awareness is always present, and you are always That. This awareness that you are has no problems. Do you sense this presence of awareness that you are right now? Does it (you) have any problems?

Q: Some of your questions above gave rise to direct understanding: 'So it is'—and then bliss. I know that this immediate and brief understanding that was followed by a longer feeling of bliss is only an experience in awareness. When this rather rare experience happens I know I have to let it be and enjoy it.

S: So you experience peace and a feeling of bliss when you see that the sense of ego is temporary and powerless, and you recognize your essential nature is this simple presence of awareness.

Q: Yes, but soon a lot of thoughts arise such as ‘Is that it? Have I taken a step more?’

S: Questions arise in this peaceful presence of awareness that you are, and appear to disturb the peace. Okay, let’s answer your questions. First, ‘Is that it?’ Yes, this is it. Second, ‘Have I taken a step more?’ No, no steps were needed. You have always been this simple presence of awareness. You can never step toward this awareness or away from it. You have always been it.

Q: Any additional comments?

S: There is no need to seek for peace or bliss. In fact, as you’ve noticed, the questioning and the seeking are disturbing the peace that is already here. You are the peace that you’ve been seeking, and you’ve seen this in your own direct experience. Your search is done.

98

No Separate I—No Suffering—No Awakening

Question: I need help awakening. I have several questions regarding awakening and would be thankful for your response. I have questioned myself time and again about whether there is a separate being here with any independent nature, and never find any central ‘I’ or anyone with control. There are just thought processes and movement of a body occurring.

Stephen: Yes, that’s what this simple inquiry reveals: there is no independent, separate entity; there is no central I, there is no ego or controlling entity here. In your own direct experience all that can be found is a body and thoughts. So it’s seen that there is no separate person, no independent I or ego there in you. Then what are you? What’s left? What’s always been here? What is it that is aware of the body and thoughts that arise? Is it consciousness? Are you this consciousness? This consciousness that you are is right here and right now.

Stop and be aware of this consciousness right now. Stop again for a moment, take a deep breath, and notice the presence of this consciousness. This is what you are. Do you notice the simplicity of this? You are this simple consciousness. This simple consciousness that you are is already awake. This simple presence of awareness that you are was never asleep. This consciousness that you are is the 'awakening' for which you've been striving. You have always been this simple presence of awareness. Without you, this consciousness, there can be no body, nor any thoughts. You are this witnessing presence that is always here and now.

Now, you've seen in your own direct experience that there is no independent I, no separate ego here; there's just a body and thoughts. So, tell me, who can awaken? Who was ever asleep? Who was suffering? There is no separate, independent person who can suffer. There is no separate, independent person who can awaken. There is only consciousness.

You are this simple presence of awareness, and in you the idea of being a separate person arose in the form of the thought 'I'. This I-thought is the birth of the appearance of separation and the beginning of personal suffering. Believing in the reality of your own existence as a separate, independent 'I', suffering is inevitable.

Seeing in your own direct experience that there is no independent I, no separate person, there can be no suffering and no awakening. The ideas of personal suffering and awakening are based on the unexamined belief in the existence of a separate I who can suffer, and a separate I who can awaken. There is no separate I.

The separate I, personal suffering, and awakening are all pure imagination. There is no I. There is no one who can suffer. There is no one who can awaken. All there is, is this consciousness, and you are this. Do you see this now? This simple recognition is the resolution of all personal suffering and seeking for awakening, liberation, and enlightenment. This is it. There's nothing to do, nothing to attain, nothing to avoid. *This is it!*

Q: In the beginning this questioning created great feelings of peace and sometimes feeling of blissful emptiness. It's been a month now since I first began. When I question my self now all I feel is stressed.

S: Drop it all. The inquiry is based on the belief in a separate I. In your own direct experience you've seen there is no separate I. It is done.

The whole story of suffering and awakening falls to pieces as it was based on a false premise—an imaginary 'I'.

Q: Even though it is seen that there is no one here when the questioning occurs, when I go about my daily life it's forgotten. How is this made into a permanent realization?

S: Your daily life is happening, but there's no 'I' there who's doing it. Life is happening, but to no one. This is not a conceptual understanding that can be remembered or forgotten. It is the non-conceptual recognition that there is no independent, separate entity here; there is only consciousness. Life goes on as it always has, but for no one.

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It is Done!

Question: You're right. It is done! It doesn't matter if the ego arises; it is seen for what it is. Everything is the same, but with a relaxing into ease.

Stephen: Yes, exactly. Everything is free to come and go in awareness, even the sense of ego. Knowing yourself as the witnessing presence there is a sense of acceptance and ease with everything that arises.

Q: Sometimes when the ego arises, simultaneously there is tension in the body. Maybe when you notice tension in people it is this ego tension? And if this is true then believing in the ego is the cause of stress in people?

S: Yes, the ego is the energy of resistance to what is. When there is no resistance to what is, there is no ego and no personal stress.

Q: In my experience, seeing through the ego has happened gradually, but the search first stopped when there was recognition of myself as being, but I am not sure about this.

S: We could say that there are two key pointers that are helpful. One is to see and know what you are in essence, awareness. And, two, to see what you are not: a separate ego. This awareness that we are is the peace that we've been seeking, and the ego is the root of psychological

suffering. Seeing these facts clearly is helpful to be free of psychological suffering and spiritual seeking.

Q: I'm writing this because there are a lot of thoughts about how and what to tell people about this. There is a tendency to tell people to do the same searching that I have done, but I know that there is nobody to do the searching.

S: You may find yourself sharing your experience with others. You may simply speak from the heart and share from your own direct experience. You speak what you have found to be true in your own experience.

Q: I think it's very helpful to know how it is and I think a part of the searching is this intellectual understanding. Then you are looking in the right direction and it is easier to recognize when it happens.

S: That has been my experience, too.

Q: A key part of the search is seeing through the ego that seems to happen gradually. Some of this seeing through the ego has for me been seeing how the belief in this ego character was very limiting and at the same time there must have been a recognition that this ego does not exist.

S: Seeing through the ego may happen over time for some people, and for others it may be an immediate realization that the ego is false, and all there is, is consciousness.

Q: I know there is a lot of thoughts about this and this may be an old habit of trying to understand.

S: Thoughts may continue or not. Either way, you remain as the simple witnessing presence, watching the parade of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and actions. Everything is happening to no one.

Q: Thank you, Stephen. I don't know how, but your words have been very helpful.

S: I'm happy to share my experience with this, and I am very happy there has been a benefit for you.

Watching the Snow Fall

Question: First of all, thank you and all the other pointers (for a lack of a better term) for the help in clearing away doubts and conceptions that we all acquire during this sojourn of relative existence we commonly call life. It seems that after listening to Sailor Bob's Podcasts, and listening to Allin Taylor's interviews with different pointers, my experience as a seeker is almost identical with the pointers and fellow seekers.

After initial questioning and seeking in the early 70's for a meaning to life: listening to Alan Watts, reading *Be Here Now*, taking acid, etc., I passed through many esoteric teachings, but never really understood what I was seeking. About four years ago there was a realization that life had become senseless and I felt the need to recover a sincerity that had become buried under by many years of apathy, cynicism and hedonism. That urgency led once again to spirituality where meditation was again taken up. During these last few years a voracious appetite for reading and exploring all the diverse viewpoints and traditions of India coupled with sadhana has led to a receptiveness to Advaita.

During the past two weeks there has been a desire to abandon sadhana because the clarity and basic truths articulated in Advaita have left me on the edge of the void. Intuitively and experientially, true nature has been felt or seen (for lack of a better term), but it disappears very quickly. How is one to get grounded in That? Would it be possible to speak directly with you by phone?

Sincerely, watching the snow fall.

Stephen: [After a phone conversation in which we discussed That which is watching the snow fall and our relationship with That, the emails below followed.]

Q: Thanks for your time on the phone last Sunday. The conversation made everything fall into place. Now, a few days later, there is a feeling of needing reinforcement or maybe affirmation. The ego/mind thing is still lingering and pouncing from time to time. The complete, undoubted acceptance of the non-existence of this person is elusive.

Let me see if I can work this out. He who says it is elusive is just a thought arising. The emotional uncertainty arising is just an appearance in awareness. Awareness is in no way affected by thoughts or

emotions. They rise and fall like waves in this sea of awareness. Wow! By doing this mini-analysis a calm has set in, and now I'm laughing at myself. I guess in my case, articulating it in this manner seems to help to fall back into awareness.

S: Yes, it is funny when you stop and notice what's really happening as you've seen yourself. Awareness is. Everything else comes and goes: thoughts, emotions, and the sense of ego. Looking out the window, I see that the snow from Sunday's blizzard has already melted; yet I am still here—watching.

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It Really is This Simple, Isn't It!?

Question: Okay, suddenly (or not so suddenly!) it is clear that this seeing-knowing-witnessing has always been here, and absolutely everything else has changed. This body, these thoughts, emotions, sensations; all of them arise out of nowhere and pass away into nowhere and always have—always have!

Memory (which is seen as just another arising in this moment) shows that this consciousness is what has never left. It saw childhood, high school, grandparents, prior worries and desires. All of those appearances (I get the term 'appearances' now—they really are just temporary) have come and gone. But the *seeing* of them is the same now as always. Even this note, these thoughts that create this note, arise and are the seeing, the consciousness.

Your pointing out that the person 'Vernon' is another arising in imagination really hit home. Vernon is just another idea; another construct in imagination, but that which sees Vernon is that which I am. The thoughts and imagination continues; maybe it always will, maybe not. Who knows or cares? It really doesn't matter, does it? It only matters when the fiction is believed. The movie is only scary when it is forgotten to be a movie.

Even happiness arises in this. But the arising, whatever it might be, no matter how beautiful or misshapen, still arises only in this space, this consciousness. So this idea of clarity may come and go, but it still comes and goes in the awareness. In the end, nothing can obscure the awareness, including the idea that awareness is obscured!

I've seen the thoughts come and go in just these few days since we

spoke. And it's clear that it is only thought that creates psychological suffering. I see it happening again and again. But the *seeing* is not at all impacted by the seen. So anything can come up in the space; it's only thinking interfering with other thinking that creates discomfort. Kind of like two different wave patterns colliding with each other to create a chaotic pattern or static, yet nothing needs to be done about it. More doing is like adding another wave to the pattern or trying to get the snow globe to clear up by shaking it harder!

Well, this is all a little weird, probably, that I would write this to you. I'm just writing because it just really hit me. It kind of snuck up on me after our talk, and I wanted to share what now seems so clear. You know, this whole 'end of psychological suffering' thing is a big deal. Thinking, conceptualizing, and imagination really is the source of all upset, and it really is completely tied to how the 'problem' impacts 'me'. What is so clear now is that the 'me' really is just an arising in awareness, too. Because there is *seeing* the thoughts which construct the problem as well as *seeing* the idea of 'me' that the thoughts are interfering with. Again, two wave patterns interfering with one another.

Well, I hope this makes some sense. I really appreciate your willingness to talk to me about all this. And, for all I know, I'll be calling you in a week! However, I've got to tell you, this seems very obvious right now, and it seems that there is no way to escape the seeing, you know? There may well be more confusion that arises in the form of thought (questioning, conceptualizing, etc.), but the seeing is still taking it all in. It really is this simple, isn't it.

Stephen: I read your email through twice. Everything you said is absolutely right on. You're seeing in your own direct experience that you *are* the seeing, the knowing, the witnessing of everything that arises. You are consciousness itself, I am.

You're seeing that Vernon and his story are simply appearances in you. You're seeing that psychological suffering is nothing more than thought, imagination, and a belief in the existence of a central character called Vernon. You're seeing that you are this witnessing presence of all that arises, and that nothing can trouble you but imagination.

You're seeing that you have always been this simple presence of awareness, and will always be. Now you know yourself as I am, and nothing can trouble you. All sorts of stories and experiences are free to come and go through you, and you remain untouched as this simple witnessing presence. No thought, no doubt, no story, no experience can ever touch you. You are the witnessing presence of everything that

appears in you.

You're seeing everything clearly. There's nothing more to do, nothing to attain, nothing to avoid. Yes, it is this simple.

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Years of Searching and Struggling Have Evaporated

Question: Hi, Stephen. I just wanted to drop you a note to say thank you for your willingness to talk with me and point me in the right direction. Since our talk, everything has become astonishingly simple and clear. Years of searching, practicing, reading, struggling, and on and on have just evaporated. I still love reading your site and others, but the sense of urgency and the sense of 'you get it and I don't' have completely disappeared. It all seems so absolutely clear.

Another interesting development has been my work with clients (I'm a counselor). Absolutely every problem that I see folks dealing with is a problem of believed thought. I used to spend a lot of time dealing with the content of thinking. Now I spend much more time helping clients see the *fact* of thought. As people become more aware of thought as the creator of their moment-to-moment experience, suffering decreases. Pointing them back to this open space of awareness/being-ness seems to have the effect of peeling thought off of their eyeballs so that it becomes another object to look at (like a lamp or bookshelf) rather than a lens to look through. Well, I certainly don't want to give the impression that everything just drops away, and people walk out without a care in the world, but they do seem to lighten up as they begin to see how thought is creating their experience moment to moment. They begin to take their thinking less seriously, and begin to not look as much in the direction of thought for answers to their problems. It seems that they get beyond their habitual thinking, and often something new will occur to them. Pointing people in the direction of seeing that we are all what is aware of thought rather than believing that thought is truth can be such a relief for people! It also saves me from getting involved in the story. When people begin to see thought as just thought, they can see each thought, in a sense, as a brick. The problem is that we all build houses out of the bricks and the houses look very real, but we forget that they're just made out of thought.

Again, Stephen, thank you very much for your work with me. This

all fell into place when you said that your whole reason for sharing this had to do with ending psychological suffering. That really struck me, as did your unrelentingly simple and practical approach. I hope all is well with you and I hope we can stay in touch.

Stephen: Thank you for sharing. It's great to hear from you! Doesn't it feel good to share this with others? I think you may have struggled with this for years as I did, so now you speak from your heart and your own direct experience, and share the fact that it's possible to be free of psychological suffering.

Years of suffering can come to an abrupt halt, followed by laughter, tears and wonder when we see that all of our problems were imaginary. And that what we are is the Peace that we were struggling to attain by controlling our imaginary stories and the experience of the imaginary character called 'me'. Thank you for staying in touch and sharing your experience.

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