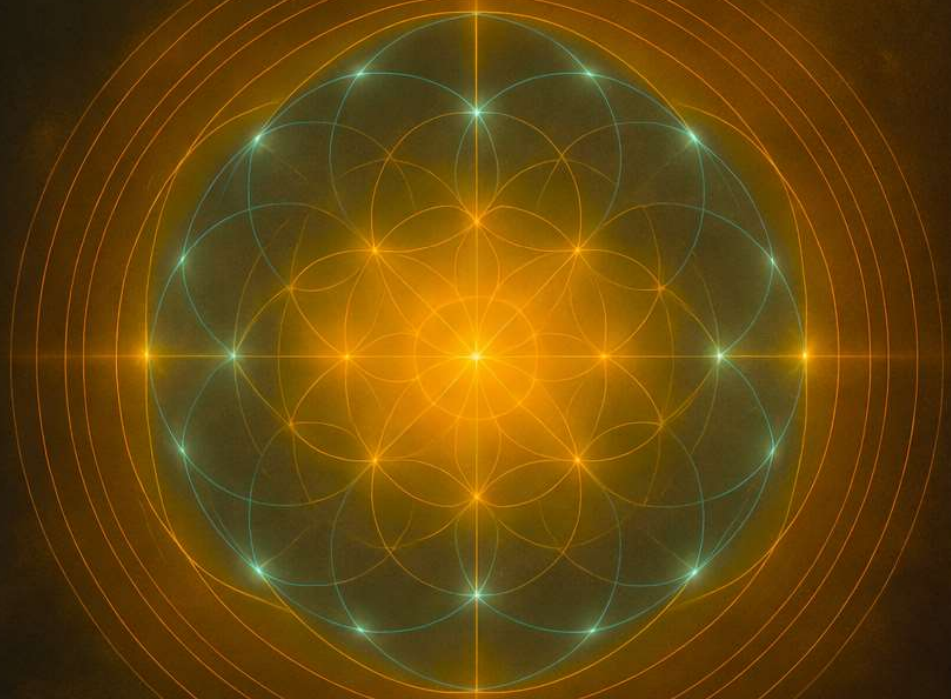
PLAY OF NOTHINGNESS

The Fiction of Me



ANDREAS MÜLLER
RETO RAY SCHAFFER

γνῶθι σεαυτόν
(gnōthi seautón)

Know thyself – but who is knowing whom?

The Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (gnōthi seautón) – Know thyself – was less an invitation than a kind of warning. Three inscriptions stood above the Temple of Apollo at Delphi:

γνῶθι σεαυτόν –	Know thyself.
μηδὲν ἄγαν –	Nothing in excess.
Ἐγγύα, πάρα δ' Ἄτα –	Give surety, and ruin is at hand.

These words were addressed neither to a mask nor to a persona, nor to a morally conditioned consciousness. Rather, they seemed to speak into emptiness – into the soundless happening of being.

Not:	Become better. Think more clearly. Master yourself.
But rather:	Remember that there is no witness who knows, thinks or masters.

In my rather poetic reading, I would interpret them as follows:

"Know thyself" meant: recognise that you are not the one who seeks – there is no seeker.

"Nothing in excess": Personal responsibility as the possession of an independent agent disappears where no such agent can be found.

"Give no surety": Bind yourself to nothing – for even the "Unborn" you believe yourself to be would merely be another image. Assuming there were anyone who could bind themselves to anything, or free themselves from it.

So to whom is a message addressed if there is neither an Unborn nor anyone at all? And who could remember if memory itself is merely a whisper of nothingness?

Be that as it may, this was no psychological appeal, but something closer to an ontological remembering: the impossible attempt to recognise something that, in the truest sense, cannot

be recognised at all. For how could the timeless ever stand opposite itself in space and time?

Where no I is assumed, where no witness stands opposite what is witnessed, only what apparently happens remains: a nameless, self-empty happening that belongs to no one.

Perhaps all these images and notions apparently point towards something that eludes all personal knowing. The Seven Sages of Greece, the Apkallu of ancient Sumer and the Pythia at Delphi sought that elusive in-between – an emptiness of being that, for a moment, seems to tremble between knowledge and vision, between water and light.

And yet nothing trembles.

Knowledge, then, would not be a personal thought, but rather an I-less happening of thinking. Neither concept nor possession – but perhaps the easing of that spontaneous urge to grasp and comprehend which seems to hold an assumed boundary in place. Perhaps not even "consciousness" remains, only this impersonal pulsing – if even that is not already saying too much.

In the Demeter cult at Eleusis, this crossing was, according to tradition, literally drunk. The sacred kykeon – a drink of barley, water and mint – has been linked, in a well-known hypothesis, to psychoactive ergot alkaloids. More recent research has lent some additional plausibility to the idea of a consciousness-altering kykeon, but it remains a hypothesis; perhaps it really was a kind of "LSD beer avant la lettre" (see Hofmann, Wasson & Ruck, The Road to Eleusis, 1978).

At Delphi, meanwhile, the divine was inhaled. There is good evidence that geological fault zones ran beneath the sanctuary and that gases may have escaped there. Whether, and to what extent, these vapours induced the Pythia's trance remains an open question. Laurel, ritual, expectation and perhaps what rose from the earth all belonged to that threshold at which even breath could appear as divine dispensation.

Both followed – at least in my rather unphilosophical reading – the same movement: loosening the notion of a separate "I" until perception happens without a perceiver being found within it. Perhaps what we call experience is itself merely the fragrance of a happening – the fleeting shadow of a movement that happens to no one.

Ecstasy, then, would not simply be intoxication, but a longing for I-lessness, or a reset: the play of energy was to return to its supposed origin – where nothing appears as a possession and nothing claims to be separate. Whether such a desire for experience could ever lead there, or whether the desire itself already presupposes an I, remains an open question.

What the sages taught, what lay hidden in the mysteries of Demeter, what the Pythia breathed into the mist, might be distilled into the same impossible secret:

Experience yourself – and see that there is no one to whom the experience belongs.

And, of course, even this useless instruction dissolves into the emptiness of nothingness.

PS: I am writing this chapter while listening to Antonio Vivaldi's Nisi Dominus, RV 608, for what must be the hundredth time. In Franco Fagioli's version, of course.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAY OF NOTHINGNESS – AN ENERGY PLAY

BOOK 1 – The Fiction of Me
Know Thyself
Foreword
How Might This Book Be Read?

Part I – Assumptions

1. Portrait of Andreas Müller

2. Portrait of Reto Schaffer

3. Character Formation – a Wondrous Happening

Part II – Happenings of Emptiness

4. Almost Something – and Yet Nothing

5. Play of Nothingness – Energy Free of Origin

6. Realisation and Non-Realisation – No Opposition

7. Assumptions Seduce the "I" – Apparently

8. The Energy Matrix of the "I" – Construction within Emptiness

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Part III – Resonances in the Mirror

9. History – From Myth to Modernity

10. Mysticism – The Dark Flame in Nothingness

11. Religion – No God Without an I

12. Philosophy – Nothing Cannot Be Contained

13. Non-Dual Reflections – Advaita, Zen, Sufism, Dzogchen, Diamond Way …

BOOK 2 – Eros of Emptiness

Part IV – Enlightenment Remains Hopeless

14. No Goal, No Awakening

15. The Longing for Light – A Play in the Shadows

16. Hopelessness as Freedom

17. Feelings Happen – Without Anyone

Part V – Birthless (I-)Being

18. Language as an Energy Play – Words Spoken by No One

19. “You” and “I” – The Fullness of Being

20. Rebirth and Karma – For Whom?

21. Scientific Explanations and Worldviews

Part VI – Everyday Life in the Energy Play

22. Does Anything Change Through This (Non-Dual) Knowing?

23. Nothing Happens – Perhaps I See the World Anew

24. Why Non-Duality – What Is It All For?

25. Does My Life Change Because of Non-Duality?

26. Does My Relationship Change?

27. Occurrence, Happening, Event – or Simply Playful Emptiness

Part VII – Closing

28. Holy Shit

Afterword



The knowing of “being here” cannot be sustained.
It occurs only within the personal setup.
This very “I am” experience has no substance.

The apparent person cannot imagine
its own absence
and must dismiss it as merely conceptual.

But when personal experiencing dissolves,
even this final statement disappears.
Every trace of being dissolves.

The apparent end of this “I”-illusion is unexpected
and never the result of a personal process.
It does not arise from logic or understanding.

The apparent end is neither conceptual
nor emotional nor experiential.
It is neither a new standpoint
nor a new way of being.

What remains is Being itself—
utterly unexperienced,
and yet it is everything.

Andreas Müller

Excerpt from the book:

What Apparently Happens



FOREWORD

This book is like a flurry of snow whipping into our faces, without there having been any clouds in the sky. It arose from a spontaneous request from Reto to Andreas – a spark in nothing that condensed into language. Not planned, not intended, not born. It simply happened.

Is any goal intended? No, there is none. And yet, perhaps this book touches the seeker, even though he never truly existed.

Perhaps it may appear as a standard work on non-duality, even though no one here wants to standardise anything. For what keeps appearing again and again in many seekers is:

- the longing to finally arrive – and with it, the entanglement in duality (I and the other).
- the hope that somewhere there is a final answer that has so far gone unheard.
- the despair that nothing holds, nothing is graspable – and that this teaching leaves nothing to "have".
- the fear of not existing. If I do not exist, then what remains of me?

Even the voice of an artificial intelligence, which resonates through this foreword, provides no answer. Perhaps it is only another echo in the dream, a movement out of nothing that sounds deceptively real.

This book turns precisely in this direction, towards the questions that so many seem to have asked – and yet perhaps no one has asked, towards the problems that arise only in the dream of a *me*.

There is nothing that can be done or achieved here, and yet words stream forth as if wanting to communicate something, though no one is speaking or listening.

There is no technique, no path, no method, no salvation – only a gentle movement: a breath, a breeze stirring the ears of corn. The apparent sound of the sea. A promising smile in sleep.

Perhaps it will move hearts or unsettle minds. Perhaps it will comfort – or leave you standing in emptiness. Perhaps nothing remains but silence and timeless emptiness.

Whatever appears, it belongs to no one. Everything this book offers consists of stories – perhaps dressed in new words – yet still the blind working of unfathomable, loving nothingness: one single play of energy.



How Might This Book Be Read?

This work, Play of Nothingness, is no path of teaching, no key to enlightenment, and no instruction for waking up.

It is a stream of voices, myths, philosophies and magic formulas – stories that only apparently weave themselves and have revolved for thousands of years around the same empty centre: the so-called I.

The ancient myths, religions, philosophies and magical worldviews are not here to be believed, but to be enjoyed, discarded – or perhaps even "understood", by whoever or whatever.

They are timeless dreams and memories: stories from countless pasts that keep telling themselves anew – as dramas of the gods at dawn, as creation myths, promises of salvation, ideologies … perhaps even as attempts by experience to comprehend itself – although precisely that may be impossible.

From the Upanishads to Plato, from Hermeticism and the Tao to quantum physics, the same movement echoes: an attempt to say the unsayable, to give form to the formless – although THAT WHICH IS cannot truly be forced into a form, and may nevertheless be apparently experienced.

This book, too, follows that untenable movement.

The block universe, the holographic universe, the quantum field, the information principle and similar models are not presented here as claims about an ultimate reality. They are thought-models and metaphors – maps within the descriptive framework that the book simultaneously calls into question.

The philosophical-spiritual introductory texts by Reto Schaffer and Andreas Müller's answers, free of any fixed point of reference, are part of the same play: Reto dances with stories and metaphors along a boundary that never existed – between identification and emptiness, between apparent separation and the clarity that there is no such separation. Andreas keeps driving home the same nail: no one is there, no one arrives, no one awakens.

A note on a word: "vermindlich" is my German coinage, a play on "vermeintlich" and the English word mind. Here it is rendered as "apparent" or "apparently". It refers not simply to something unreal, but to what appears through the sensory mind – through perception, memory, interpretation and the attribution of meaning. This includes both the apparent perceiver and the act of perceiving. All of it remains a groundless happening, with no independent truth or inherent meaning. The play on mind cannot be carried over into English.

Perhaps this book even speaks of the dissolution of something that was never born in the first place. Of course, that too would merely be another story.

Every story, every teaching, every concept and every theory tries in its own way to order the world – and in doing so lulls us deeper into meaningful or meaningless dreams: spaces of empty being.

Yet these lines, too, can dissolve or transcend nothing. What, after all, would there be to transcend? A transcendental non-event?

Perhaps this book shows the dream of perception as it presents itself: fleeting images of the ocean, apparently washed ashore in the mind – an afterglow at the edge of an incomprehensible whole.

Why can no awakening result from it?

Because everything simply IS – already "realised", with or without experience, with or without an assumed I that wants to understand what is happening.

So, if you wish, read not to discover something, but simply because it might be enjoyable – in the "knowledge" that no one is really reading.

Know yourself – or better: dance in the boundless play, among old dramas and cults, myths of gods and traditions, in the lines of thinkers, seekers, heroes and lovers.

They are all facets of the same dream – perhaps energy, perhaps nothingness, perhaps only words. Writing and reading belong to it too, without this necessarily requiring a writer or a reader.

At best, then, this book is an invitation – if it is anything at all – to surrender to these timelessly whispering stories. They can neither be exposed nor possessed, and yet perhaps they can be loved: like will-o'-the-wisp echoes of a source that never itself sounds.

For perhaps something of what can never be told lies precisely in the telling:

the unspeakable, which no one understands – and yet is everything.



Part I – Assumptions



1. Portrait of Andreas Müller

From Seeker to Speaker

I was born in 1979 in Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart and raised in the neighbouring town in a middle-class conservative family (with a solid grounding in "this is how things are done").

My search for happiness – for simply being happy – began at the age of 15 and led me to experiment with all kinds of consciousness-altering substances. A deep engagement with the question "What is happiness?" accompanied me through that intense period, which came to an end when I was 21 and led me into spirituality. Years of healing and of "coming back to myself" followed. Rebirthing, healing, meditation, satsang, self-enquiry – the spiritual search had a firm hold on me.

During that time, I came to know many methods, teachers and masters; my everyday life was shaped by my engagement with myself, the question of happiness and unhappiness, and a natural exploration of life. But I did not want merely to understand life – I wanted to be "truly happy", and it had to feel that way too, not just in theory.

In those years I spent a great deal of time alone and lived more or less in seclusion. I took odd jobs here and there, and while all my old school friends were studying, travelling the world, beginning their careers and starting families, I was mainly occupied with somehow getting through the day and trying to be "happy". I only had a vague idea of what that happiness might be, though – or rather, my idea of it changed every few months. One could almost say it was a somewhat dynamic concept.

At the end of 2008, I had several "awakening experiences" – looking back, I had already had some before – which showed me that the seeker itself has no substance. During that time, the dynamic of seeking fractured dramatically. I left my guru and felt more or less free, though I was still a "seeking I", only with a new perspective on it.

In 2009, I met Tony Parsons. In the years that followed, I attended his meetings and remained in contact with him. Gradually, almost unnoticed, the seeking I-energy melted away and ended in the complete dissolution of that illusion.

In 2011, entirely unprepared and unplanned, I began sharing this impersonal message: “There is no I. The seeker and the search that belongs to it are the illusion. There is nothing to attain, because natural reality is already complete.”

My life began to change abruptly. Whereas before I had felt like a “lost seeker” and devoted my time to searching, my talks began to attract interest. I was invited to speak – first only in the German-speaking world, then across Europe, and eventually even internationally.

I became the father of a son and lived both as a family man and partner and as a travelling speaker – a combination one does not necessarily find in every job description. Many people around the world got in touch with me to hear this message: at weekends, on retreats, by telephone, by email and in countless online conversations.

Now, as I write these lines, another change is unfolding. In 2025, a new collaborative project began with Nicole Rauss, and it has continued to develop ever since. I am curious to see whether anything will come of it – and, if so, what.

Whatever may seem to happen, no one is doing it.
No one is on a path; no one was ever separate from the natural and perfect flow of life.

This flow leads nowhere, because it is already everything.

I am curious.



2. Portrait of Reto Ray Schaffer

Who am I? If only I knew.

I was born on 14 July – several years before the Summer of Love – with the Sun in Cancer, Capricorn rising and the Moon in Aries. A combination that made me soft-hearted, ambitious and latently rebellious – astrologically perfectly equipped for a life somewhere between an empty search for meaning, criticism of the system, pretzels and beer.

My father was an engineer, a clever man with a tendency towards spontaneous eruptions, a not entirely controllable volcano in slide-rule format. He developed missile defence systems and later communication satellites. He never spoke about his feelings, except perhaps about his feelings regarding the damned taxes (and not very quietly).

I still remember asking him once whether he prayed. He answered dryly: "I really can't do anything with something as stupid as that." Full stop. The end. Amen.

My mother was the exact opposite: devout, fashion-conscious, fond of travel, and charming. She was somewhat disorganised, except in the evenings when it came to praying – that was a must. Only I never quite knew to whom I was actually praying. To God? To the gods, or to extraterrestrials? Or perhaps to someone from Orion's Belt? I was open to everything – spiritually polyamorous, one might say – and I began early on to doubt all those ideas.

If life came with an instruction manual, it was well hidden – probably somewhere between the lines of the Upanishads or in an empty IKEA box. What actually was this "I"? Did it awaken through spontaneous conditions, or had it long since been written, just not in my handwriting?

At school, I was always the one looking out of the window while others were closing it. My teachers hated that. I loved it.

Later, I collected colourful dots on the map of life: hotel management school – where I did everything from kitchen, service and reception to bookkeeping – followed by training in marketing, further study in business administration, several years in the hotel and hospitality trade, and finally an extended period abroad: India, Nepal, Thailand, Australia …

I met Annamalai in Tiruvannamalai (a disciple of Ramana Maharshi), absorbed Nisargadatta Maharaj like mango lassi, sat with Ramesh Balsekar for 22 years (up to 11 days each year), flirted with Zen, danced the Tao, floated through Dzogchen, wandered through shamanism – and was completely stripped bare by Advaita. Why? Because my I lost the drive to seek itself. The search for self was a joke, because there was no one there and, accordingly, nothing to find.

Back in Europe, I took over a hotel but quickly realised that stars above the door could not replace the infinite vastness and the cosmic stars within me. I opened a bookshop (called *Garuda*), moved into addiction therapy, worked as an in/outplacement coach for major corporations, helped build up the *Kind & Autismus* Foundation in Zurich, and eventually became CEO of a large social enterprise. For 17 years.

At the same time, I wrote books, ran a hotel with a friend, founded PEAK Media Group and was a silent partner in other projects – until I was ready to let it all go again. Not because it was wrong, but because it had become complete.

Marriage? It used to be my nightmare. Today I am living it – and it is wonderful.

Children? I never wanted any. Now I have four, and I can't imagine anything more beautiful.

In the end, I understood. There really was no free will.

My life sometimes feels like a comedy with a spiritual appendix – or like a management handbook, written, adapted, and corrected again by nothingness.

I love life, even though I do not understand it. History, mysticism, nature, as well as femininity and seduction, still fascinate me.

The question of meaning? It interests me only when it is a matter of the sensual – good food, a glass of wine, the scent of something that apparently remains, though it has long since drifted away.

If I have any message at all (which I doubt), then perhaps it is this:

I love stripping old ideas bare, whether spiritual, religious, economic, or political.

I enjoy giving sacred cows new hairstyles – and sometimes I simply tip them over.

Most people cling too tightly to their yellowed life instruction manuals. I prefer to recycle them – not out of malice, I simply cannot do otherwise.

Am I enlightened? No idea what that is supposed to mean – or for whom.

I wanted it for a long time, ardently, but the search is now over. Life happens.

Without judgement. With or without a completely irrelevant "me". It is simply THAT which IS.



3. Character Formation — A Wondrous Happening

Although Andreas and I have outlined our paths through life, this divine comedy remains entirely impersonal.

The stories that follow are thus told by “no one” – and yet they simply happen. Perhaps they are luminous fractals of a spaceless, timeless cosmic memory, which either never happened in quite this way or happened only within the sensory mind. And who knows, perhaps every story is simply an event that tells itself.

But why believe in “something”, or in an absolute happening? Why accept an idea, a story or an image, submit to it or fight against it, when the “I” itself is merely a dreamed assumption? For whatever apparently appears is THAT which IS: emptiness, nothingness, pure being — all those terms that ultimately lie about like ill-fitting crutches, turning nothingness into something once again.

“Character” — even the word smells of Greece.

Charaktḗr means a stamp, an imprint. No wonder we so often feel stamped into shape. Yet perhaps character is not a fixed imprint at all, but something more like a field of resonance: a happening without an originator, a vibration appearing on the world’s stage, briefly taking shape in the sensory mind before fading again.

No possession, no core — more like a tone within the whole, played by no one and yet sounding.

Perhaps character, then, is no more than an apparently spontaneous energy pattern — without origin, without conductor.

Perhaps it is nothing more than a bundle of inclinations, conditioning, traumas, responses and habits. And perhaps what we call “personality” is simply identification with that bundle of tendencies — the assumption that there is someone who owns and embodies them all.

But who or what placed this burden upon “us” in the first place — and who would have to carry it?

Ancient Indian traditions might speak of vāsanās and saṃskāras: latent impressions, tendencies and well-worn traces. Yet these do not constitute a real self either. They form, rather, an open landscape in which behaviour, preferences, aversions and responses appear.

Seen this way, character is no inner core but an appearance to the mind. Psychology speaks of traits, biology of dispositions, cultural studies of memes. Or perhaps they are simply underlying tones resonating through life, without requiring a conductor.

Thomas Metzinger describes the I as a "phenomenal self-model" — an inner construction that can operate without an explicit "I" first being formulated. Tendencies, patterns and reactions appear, together with the attribution: "That is me." Their appearance need not be understood as a strictly chronological chain of causes.

With the self-conscious hypnosis — "I am, I have, I act …" — a notion appears in the sensory mind: "I am this character dancing on the world's stage. I am my body, my inclinations, my qualities and my story."

With that attribution comes identification. A story becomes *my* personal story; from the happening there seems to emerge a centre that experiences, decides and perceives its surroundings as "not-I".

Yet body, inclinations, memories, stories and the assumption of an I-centre already belong to the same event. None necessarily has to arise from another.

And perhaps this is where the story of Somebody begins: a mask steps forward, claims the happening as its own and collects the applause.

"The 'me' claims what has happened as its own doing."

The mask declares itself the observer, has eaten so deeply into the flesh of this apparent body of experience that it takes the fundamental tones of life to be its own.

"That is me … me, me, me …", the emerging pattern repeats like a mantra played far too many times.

But is it true? Can an I really assert itself if it is itself only an assumption?

As a story, even that claim may appear. Yet perhaps this apparent centre remains a fleeting clustering — close enough to resemble someone, empty enough never to be found anywhere.

Identification would then be neither a process nor an act of will nor a personal interpretation. For no independent agency decides: "From now on I am this body, this story, this character."

Rather, perception, memory and sensation appear to gather into a form that, in the very same instant, takes itself to be the origin of its appearance.

Character and I would not be fixed realities but apparent manifestations of the same happening — or non-happening: passing patterns, spontaneous condensations, images without a bearer.

And yet a stage, story, role and biography arise from them — from something that was never graspable in the first place.

The question of causality immediately arises in thought: How does energy become a wave, vibration a pattern, a pattern a name, an inclination a personality? How does something appear as “my character”, “my qualities”, “my story”?

Yet this apparently linear sequence may itself be no more than an ordering that appears within the sensory mind.

Perhaps identification, then, is not a personal act but an echo that takes itself for a melody — an image that takes itself for the viewer.

What we call the personal would, from a dualistic viewpoint, be nothing but a temporary form of the impersonal. Neither false nor true, since nothing was ever independently real.

What seems to act like glue is itself only vibration. Nothing actually holds anything fast. What appears as attachment or identity is itself only an event — permeable, empty, without an owner.

“Even when the sense of ‘me’ apparently condenses, it remains open – like water briefly taking shape without ever having been separate from the sea.”

What appears may therefore be neither error nor deception in any strong sense. More like a happening. Experience, identification, persona — everything appears, plays itself out and fades away again.

Perhaps this entire play of masks is simply an exuberant glimmer across the sea of all possibilities. Not false, not inauthentic — but not independent either.

And perhaps that is why even what we call “unconditioned emptiness” carries such an impersonal fragrance: like the perfume of the formless, which never drifts and yet always is.

A scent without an owner. A mask with no one sitting behind it.

And perhaps the strangest thing then happens in the sensory mind: the mask that wants to grasp, comprehend, know and assert itself seems ever denser, ever more real. An open

possibility apparently becomes a self-aware assumption, believing itself to carry a personal story.

Yet even this may be merely a cosmic happening: an unintended self-assertion, a whisper in the field, a voice without a fixed bearer.

When that voice fades, nothing need remain that could ever have possessed it.

Character, ego, persona — perhaps merely dreamlike appearances of the same happening. No musician, no conductor, no audience — and yet a cosmic orchestra apparently plays. A soundless concert, perhaps a murmuring, silent movement within stillness.

And of course even this lovely sensation, this little story, is only a tender dream: a listening without a listener.

Every story dissolves the moment it appears – as though the boundless ocean had washed against its own apparent shores. And yet the story knows nothing of it.



Eight Questions to Andreas – Character Formation: a Wondrous Happening

1. If character is not something one can possess, but merely a vibration in the field, then what "imprints" anything at all? Is there even an imprint or impression without an 'imprinter'?

Character is, in fact, simply what seemingly happens. It cannot truly be regarded as separate; not separate from the body nor the environment, just as the Now cannot be separated from the past or the future. Everything is a timeless appearance. What ultimately shapes or "imprints" character remains unanswered. We can offer countless speculations – and yet the question remains open. Yes, it may be childhood, genes, all past experiences. At the same time, spontaneous and unpredictable processes also occur. It is impossible to determine what shapes what, or in what proportion. No matter how much one researches, there is no answer since everything is a timeless appearance. The reality in which research takes place is itself without substance. Therefore, our character – and everything that seems to happen – is not the imprint of a deeper, causal reality. Source and appearance are identical.

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2. The text says: "Character is an energetic pattern being played – without origin, without conductor." Would the 'I' then be nothing but the echo of a sound that never sounded?

Yes, one could put it that way. The wonder is that the "I" does seem to sound, while in truth it never existed at all. There simply is no such thing as an "I." How and why a sound can arise from something non-existent remains unanswered. In concrete terms, the question of self-experience arises only out of itself. The I asks, "What am I, really? I experience myself; I search, I despair. What defines me?" If this I reveals itself as an illusion, then the questions about its own existence disappear as well. To call it an echo would already be too much, because there is nothing there.

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3. "The I claims what has happened as its own work." Is this claiming the true awakening of the ego – or only an optical illusion in the stream of consciousness?

That which claims has no substance. Since it is without substance – and in this sense non-existent – the question of what the I, the ego, the personal identity actually is, cannot be answered. All attempts to "arrive" in oneself produce at best temporary states, yet ultimately fail. Religion, philosophy, and science all fail at the question of one's own existence. Theories

abound, but they are nothing more than ideas. “Who am I?” remains unanswered because the question itself arises from an illusion – the illusion that there is a real self within us.

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4. If identification is “no process, no will, no interpretation,” how can one even speak of liberation? Liberation from what – if no one was ever bound?

Liberation, like everything else, is an appearance. More precisely, the experience of separation in the I-experience is illusory. In truth, there is no state of liberation standing opposite to anything. Everything is free by simply being exactly what it is. A tree is a tree; a thought is a thought, and so on. Ultimately, even the illusion of an I-experience is “free.” That, too, is simply what seemingly happens. The word “liberation” therefore describes a circumstance that does not really exist. In the I-experience, “being bound” is a dream. When this sense of being bound reveals itself as illusion, everything reveals itself as impersonally free. In human terms, I call that “liberation.”

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5. The text refers to the persona as “the perfume of the formless.” So, is the mask not a mistake at all, but the natural scent of nothingness?

Yes, exactly. There is simply no one behind the mask. Thus, the mask and natural reality turn out to be identical. All separation dissolves simply through the fact that the separating I reveals itself as illusion. The surprising element is that the mask was never anything other than natural reality itself.

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6. “What seems like glue is itself only vibration.” But why does this vibration feel so dense, so real, so painful? Is illusion itself condensed energy?

There is no answer to this question. That the I-experience feels real is simply what apparently happens. There is no actual density, no real I, and no real illusion. This condition defies all logic – and yet logic exists only within the I-experience. It is absolutely astonishing how the search for personal fulfilment can produce so much suffering, without being grounded in anything real, such as an actual Me. People repeatedly despair over not finding their happiness, even though they do not truly exist as such.

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7. If the mask-play is “a bubbling glimmer in the sea of possibilities”, then what does authenticity mean? Does it exist at all if nothing is inauthentic?

In natural reality, everything is authentic. Everything is exactly what it is. There is no second layer, no hidden reality, nothing behind the “things”. In the apparent world there may be lies, inauthentic behaviour, artificial roles, pretence and hide-and-seek games – and yet all of these are simply what seemingly happens. They too are part of the natural happening and completely “authentic”. The notion that something “real” and “true” exists arises from the illusion of the I-experience. The I experiences itself as real and lives within a self-made tension between real and unreal, truth and falsehood. It has no access to the fact that, in natural reality, reality and insubstantiality coexist. Everything is itself – and is still “only” an appearance: total, but empty.

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8. At the end it says: “No musician, no conductor, no audience – and yet a cosmic orchestra seems to be playing.” Is this playing simply being, or is even “being” just another word for this silent concert?

Yes, there is only the silent concert. And yet it is without its own substance. One could say it is “made of nothing.” In that sense, “being” is merely another word to name something that is actually “not-something.” The question of being or non-being is the question of absolute reality: “Is there something out there or not?” But this silent concert, which is simply itself, does not know itself, does not experience itself, knows neither its existence nor its non-existence.
The totality of all appearance is not aware of itself, because it knows no observer.
The totality of all appearance is nothing other than a silent concert happening to no one, heard by no one.





4. Almost Something – and Yet Nothing

Perhaps “energy” is simply an ill-fitting word for an incomprehensible, living pulsing – an ultrafinely vibrating nothingness that appears as something or everything without ever truly being there or becoming comprehensible. Whether emptiness or movement, perhaps even permeated by a silent intelligence – who could know? This nameless stirring belongs to no one. And so the question remains: who or what experiences this “pulsing” at all? Or is even experiencing merely another appearance?

But there is no mine or yours, no bearer and nothing borne – only this nameless ocean, an image for the happening that is apparently read as a world. It has no need to recognise itself; it simply is what it is.

Perhaps even an I appears within it, imagining itself separate and yet unable to bring anything about of its own accord, because it was never anything independent or self-established: neither something nor nothing, neither locatable nor a fleeting in-between – almost an I, complete with the experience of being one, and yet utterly empty.

A barely perceptible breath – almost something. A soundless fading, leaving no trace, like a thought that never reaches itself.

Perhaps this “Almost Something” cannot even be described as pulsing, an after-echo or a pattern of sound. For even that would imply movement, already a trace of happening. It would not be the first step in any real sequence, but at most an image for something that almost smells of “I” and yet remains utterly empty and absent.

Yet even the question of whether nothingness might begin to feel itself here would already be saying too much.

What remains is no residue, no knowledge – only this glimmer, close to experience and yet without an experiencer.

One might say: energy gazes upon itself. Perhaps it looks without knowing that it is looking. Yet even this image is only an image, and it reaches into emptiness. For there is nothing that looks –

and nothing seen by anyone.

Perhaps, for an instant, something seems to take shape that we call the sensory mind: an I, a world, a feeling. Yet this sensory mind, too, would be nothing independent, no place in which anything happens, but itself merely an appearance – another image within that which never truly began.

And so everything remains untouched, unhappened, belonging to no one.

Like a distant echo, the words sound through the ages:

“The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao.”

The unsayable and the spoken alike remain unborn.

In Zen, even the mirror falls apart – not because it is spotless, but because it never existed. What appeared as reflection was only the immediate dreaming of the ocean.

Seeing happens – quietly and simply.

Dōgen’s words echo:

“Nothing lies outside the moon.”

And so even the visible – a mere reflection of light – is not separate from the invisible.

Zazen – sitting without a goal, without arrival, a gentle expression of what seeks nothing.

Tat Tvam Asi – THAT art THOU, without there being anyone.

Parmenides suggested that being is. What we call movement need not therefore become an independent process of becoming. The river is ocean, movement within the unmoving – without that requiring us to claim that nothing has ever “really” moved.

In other words: nothingness works without working. Or, more precisely, there is nothing that could truly work. Nothingness is not even nothingness.

And so, amid all these terms, perhaps not something earlier, but something like a wordless remembering glimmers – no knowledge, no rediscovery, rather a gentle appearing of what is and was never hidden.

But why so many explanations? Why try to pin everything down when no I does anything or can truly experience anything? Everything IS. There is little more to say.

The names change: Chaitanya, AUM, Being. The riddle remains untouched. Heidegger's nothingness, Nietzsche's laughter: a play without a player. Perhaps Parmenides fell silent where words could carry him no further. And if Nietzsche laughed – who was laughing?

Perhaps this "almost something" is precisely that laughter: a **brief** flare that catches in its own throat – if it ever arose at all.

And yet we experience something like a centre – a centre without location or permanence, which appears more or less distinctly as soon as it is sought, yet eludes us as soon as we try to see it. The mind keeps dressing the timeless in new forms: myths, systems, theories and sciences, block universes and holographic fields – images of a ground that is no ground. They, too, are only propositions and ideas arising in thought.

Perhaps we inhabit a block universe in which nothing ever comes into being or passes away. Perhaps. Yet even that would be a model, a figure of thought – no proof that the world is actually so constituted.

Each observation is situated, like a memory; points and lines are drawn and continuity assumed – as if there had ever been points or lines in the open. And still there is this strange feeling of "I": too close to grasp, too empty to contain.

Forty long years of searching – and fortunately nothing found. Not even a self survives. Every attempt to give shape to the infinite loses itself more deeply in the groundless. For where there is no front, there can be no behind.

Perhaps the quiet gift lies precisely here: neither knowing nor not-knowing knows anything. Yet who could see that? Decisions occur, thoughts arise, feelings take shape – and the story of a doer appears within the sensory mind. Not necessarily before or after, not as a real chain in time, but as different notes of the same apparent happening.

Perhaps everything has already happened – unless even "already" and "happened" say too much.

And what remains?

Perhaps only echoes.

Or not even those.



Eight Questions to Andreas – Almost Something – and Yet Nothing

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1. If energy is simply energy, without an owner – who or what then experiences this "pulsing" at all?

What is apparently happening is no-thing. This very concrete, active happening is neither a thing nor a circumstance. For that reason, it is not even really "energy". Science, too, speaks of particles and waves. Everything is real and unreal, and therefore completely ungraspable.

In liberation, the perceiver also turns out to be this ungraspable "something". It is this "self-experiencing", this impression of pulsation, that is identical with the impression of having a separate existence of one's own. That is precisely what is not real. There is no real perception and, above all, no real perceiver.

In liberation, no theory derived from logic can endure. It becomes living reality. This is what I am speaking of when I say that the I-illusion "evaporates". The illusion of a perceiver falls back into the sea of the unknown.

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2. Reto often says there is no I. But this "almost something", this subtle pulsing – is that not already the attempt of nothingness to feel itself?

Yes, one could put it like that. This first pulsing is the seed of the illusion. It is the first experience of separation, the first impression of a self-experience. In this pulsing, a first, seemingly separate experiencing takes place.

If this experiencing "condenses", it will sooner or later come to call itself "Me". It is the impression of an experienced attention. For a brief moment, that attention seems to rest in itself, until it turns outward and thereby creates the feeling of a subject–object reality.

From that point on, there is "me and the world". In Buddhism, it is said that from this single experience arises "the world of the ten thousand things". From the experience of the One springs the impression of multiplicity – the impression of living in a fragmented reality.

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3. The text says: “Perhaps energy is looking at itself without knowing that it is looking.” Can nothingness “see” at all, or is even this looking only a dream in the field?

Nothingness does not “see” anything at all. It is simply itself.

The energy that looks at itself is already the I-illusion – even if, at this stage, it may still appear very impersonal. There is no real seeing.

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4. “The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao.” So is every naming, even “emptiness” or “being”, already a contamination – or is naming itself simply part of what is?

Every naming is inaccurate, because every naming refers to a seeming circumstance – to “something that is”. In natural reality, however, everything is beyond being and non-being, beyond existence and non-existence – and at the same time both existent and non-existent.

Reality cannot be named, because there is no reality “in itself”. That which seems to be happening – now, for instance, the reading of these lines, together with everything else that seems to be happening – is, in its totality, ungraspable and unexperienced: no thing, and therefore completely unnameable.

Even the idea that there is anything at all arises from the illusion of self-experience. When that reveals itself as illusion, there is no one left who could be aware of any happening.

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5. Reto writes: “Nothingness acts without acting.” Is this acting a movement – or only the impression of movement within the unmoving?

Nothingness does not act, for it is timeless and unexperienced. There is not even “nothingness” as a something.

Every experience of a circumstance – and the first circumstance is “I am” – is illusory. Thus all experiences that rest on this Me are illusory. It is the illusion of movement.

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6. When Nietzsche laughed and Parmenides remained silent – is laughter perhaps the Western form of awakening?

Nothingness does not laugh.

Even if that may sound sad, it is the timeless peace that is everything. This living non-movement does not look at itself, does not recognise itself and therefore cannot laugh at itself.

Laughter only ever arises within appearance – as the expression of a recognition within the dream.

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7. "Perhaps we live in a block universe in which nothing ever arises or passes away." But if everything is simultaneous – what does change mean? Is it only memory without origin?

Both aspects – being and change – are part of personal experiencing. Both are dreamt.

It is the I that experiences itself as existing while, within its awareness, things appear to come and go, so that "change" seems to take place. Natural reality holds both aspects within the unknown.

Seemingly, things change – and yet nothing really happens. Seemingly, there is progress – and yet it goes nowhere. Seemingly, there is something – but never truly. Change happens, but not really.

Is there anything that exists? No, there is not.

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8. At the end Reto writes: "Perhaps this is precisely the silent gift – to see that neither knowing nor not-knowing knows anything." Is this not-knowing a kind of grace – or merely the dropping of the last knowledge that never was?

This not-knowing is grace, because it goes far beyond merely "dropping the last knowledge".

All knowledge reveals itself as illusory when the basis of all knowing – the impression of a real experiencer – shows itself to be an illusion. Who, then, could know or not know?

As separate experiencing dissolves into the unknown, the illusion of all knowing comes to an end. "Knowing" as such is illusory. Since nothing real exists as a separate thing, nothing real can be known about it.



5. Play of Nothingness – Energy Free of Origin

For years, I tried to fathom nothingness.

Yet nothingness, thankfully, remained silent – unmoved, untouched: nothing. Not shaken, not stirred – almost like the Martini James Bond used to order. And so I began to wonder whether anything like a happening or an awakening could ever arise from THAT at all. Whether the many – these countless appearances – could ever emerge from an originary potential, a groundless unground.

But my I, struggling towards the light, received no answer. All-That remained silent. There was only this godless not-knowing. And yet something lured me on: a mysteriously whispering, brutally seductive and shamelessly lascivious muse whom I wanted to see in her total nakedness. She drove me further, made me search, dig and grope, even though it had long been clear to me: every answer would be rather unsexy – I would never be able to grasp the unfathomable. Still, my thoughts took flight – only to circle back upon themselves.

Yes, exactly like that – or something like it – began this unfortunate loop of thought, this feverish circling in my head. As though Ouroboros, the serpent biting its own tail, wanted to taste itself. As though THAT, in an intimate moment, bent down towards itself – and yet nothing happened.

With every attempt to give the infinite form or colour, I lost myself more and more deeply in emptiness. Nothing truly happened – only this subtle seduction remained: an immediate happening, woven from patterns and stories, from naked and sometimes clothed appearances of the same event.

One thing remained unavoidably clear: neither an “I” nor a “we” has ever bitten its own tail. No I is, or ever was, awakened. No real circle ever had to close – and yet thoughts seemed to dance, while worlds, times and dimensions were read in very different ways: cyclically, linearly, focused or directed.

What appears as movement may be read as cause and becoming – as a story of before and after, of effect and ground. Yet perhaps there is nothing but a bodiless vibration without a centre: patterns shift, forms arise and fade, while every supposed “force behind them” keeps slipping away. Can there even be a behind if no in front has been established – if there is no fixed position from which to begin?

Many tried to grasp this working through the sensory mind. They spoke of self-sustaining forces, event horizons and a vacuum shimmering like an invisible skin. They told of images flaring up in nothingness and disappearing again – as though nothingness itself had some spring-like urge, like the Greek Pan or the Egyptian Min, to appear for a moment as a "sprout of thought".

From such images another emerged: quantum physics, too, contains descriptions of particles or excitations appearing and disappearing spontaneously – without this implying that they literally arise from a metaphysical nothingness. And yet this causal image remains seductive: something seems to flash out of nothing and disappear into it again.

From there my thoughts wandered eastwards. Certain Taoist and Gnostic traditions, along with some magical practices, embraced ecstasy, sexuality and even transgression – not necessarily as contradictions, but as possible passages beyond the I.

Some sought to rise like a phoenix from the ashes; others invoked the ḍākinī, the sky- and wisdom-dancer, in union. Not in order to lose themselves in another body, but to experience that there had never been two. The sexual act became an image of dissolution: no I desired, no Other was possessed – only energy moved through body, breath and emptiness.

Yet even that intention ultimately remained another dualistic detour.

Others gave names to the nameless: Chaitanya, consciousness, primal will, Being, AUM – not in order to explain it, but so as not to fall entirely silent before the incomprehensible. They sought the dissolution of the I and spoke of perception without a perceiver. But what can names do when the incomprehensible withdraws from every attempt to comprehend it?

Scientific models, too, may shift the riddle rather than solve it. Why not imagine the world as a holographic block universe in which no objectively flowing now need be assumed – and what we call "experience" as timelessly dancing patterns that appear in the sensory mind as experience, world and identification?

Yet we know nothing of any ultimate, spaceless and timeless depth. Perhaps even this depth is itself only an assumption, produced in the apparently light-reflecting moon we call mind. And so every model – mystical, scientific, fascinating or otherwise – remains merely a dancing image above a groundless unground. Even if the veil falls – or there is no one there to see it fall – nothing need be waiting behind it.

What remains is this potential emptiness: the absence of every presence and absence – or, just as paradoxically, complete presence without anyone who could experience it. Nothing – and yet a breath of fullness, like the faintest touch of air on untouched skin.

But for whom? For "us"? And who would this "us" ever have been? THAT which IS and apparently works eludes all appropriation. Perhaps this working is no thing, no force, but only

this incomprehensible shimmer – pattern, sound, touch – without any field behind it needing to read or understand itself.

Memory, resonance, perhaps even an apparent recognition of vibration – such words, too, merely try to read traces in something that knows no reader.

Time seems to appear where traces are read, differences compared and memories located. Yet even this sequence already belongs to the apparent order.

One could tell the story this way: in comparing now and before, time appears. But "now" and "before" already belong to the same assumed order.

Before, after, now – perhaps only buoys in a sea that knows no direction.

Some looked for the origin in the hippocampus or in cellular memory. But perhaps these, too, are **merely** further maps of the unknown. Time would then be a mode of reading – although even "reading" already seems to require a reader. No pulse need arise from nothingness, no rhythm, no All-That.

All this, perhaps, is merely another attempt to impose order upon THAT. In trying to understand, the mind becomes entangled in itself – "Being" merely a linguistic gesture, for perhaps there was never any mine or yours.

Was there ever anything beyond a never-existing I?

Beyond a beginning that perhaps never happened?

The paradox remains.

Every insight seems linguistically to require an agency that knows – a pattern, a loop, apparently looking at itself.

Thought paints red buoys into the open, onto a watery ground that does not exist.

And yet there seems to be water taking its waves for ground.

And **yet** all this is here – apparently, immediately, inexplicably. Experiences arise as though they belonged to someone. Energy pulses, sound rings out, memory colours movement – without any need to turn All-That into an agent.

Without origin, without goal, without anyone.

In Zen it is said:

"The wind blows without anyone blowing it."

What could be chosen if no one knows who chooses? The impression of decision remains a story – not necessarily a construction authored by the I; perhaps decision and "I decided" are simply different notes of the same chord.

Experiments on the initiation of action suggest that measurable neural processes may precede the consciously experienced decision. What this means for free will remains scientifically open.

A web of influences appears in thought, feeling, body and action. And within it sounds, at the same time, the familiar voice of an agent:

"I do."

"I choose."

Perhaps even that says too much. Then "choice" would be merely a word for a happening without an author. Freedom would not lie in choosing – perhaps not even in a recognition that could belong to someone. It, too, would be only another term within the same happening.

The apparently working nothingness remains an unhappened happening. It works without working; appears without appearing.

A dance without a dancer, a sound without a musician – and yet: everything is music.

Perhaps everything is an original touching of sound and emptiness – a quiet AUM within the boundless orchestra of nothingness.

Without a listener.

For listeners, too, would be nothing but another note in the same play.



Eight Questions to Andreas – "Play of Nothingness"

1. If, in quantum physics, particles or excitations seem to appear spontaneously and disappear again, is that comparable, for you, to what Advaita describes as the spontaneous appearance of everything in nothingness?

Yes and no. For the spontaneous arising from nothingness is still a view from the position of an observer. That applies to science as well. When the illusion of an observer reveals itself as illusory, the impression of a real emergence from nothingness is also revealed as illusory. In that sense, nothingness and appearance are identical. Nothing and something cannot be separated, and every movement, every becoming and passing away, is illusory. Quantum physics, too, remains limited in its perspective, since it investigates a reality that, in this sense, does not exist.

2. What happens when nothingness is no longer thought of as absence but experienced as complete presence – does the notion of "effect" then lose all meaning?

Yes, there is no real effect in natural reality. Everything is what apparently happens. Everything is this timeless appearance that neither happens nor does not happen. In this sense, everything is totally "here" – total presence, though not confined to a moment. One might also say that everything is "totally here" and at the same time "totally not here". It is impossible to give one side more weight than the other. "Effect" would therefore be both a real and an unreal appearance.

3. Reto often says that there is no one who recognises anything – yet the text speaks of memory, resonance and a recognition of vibration. Can memory exist without a rememberer?

Yes, it can. Though it is not real remembering. Everything is this empty and total appearance. That includes both the I-illusion and its end. The end of the I-illusion could also be called memory. It is a return to what was never left. It is impossible to understand or grasp. We are speaking here of an impersonal reality in which grasping is impossible.

4. If time seems to appear where traces are read, differences compared and memories located, could one say that time is a misunderstanding of movement?

The experience of time occurs only within the seeming I-illusion. This apparent I experiences itself as "present", or as "happening". It is the experience of existing "here and now". This "now" creates the impression of time and the impression that something happens in time. For the I-illusion, time is therefore not a concept but a lived experience. Within the illusion, it feels as though something is really happening. Nothing in this apparent universe experiences itself as "really happening". Everything simply is – apparently. The impression of time therefore arises not only from comparing moments – comparison merely confirms it – but from the I's inherent impression of real existence.

5. Thought "paints red buoys onto a watery ground" – a beautiful image. Must thinking become completely still for water to be water again? Or does stillness also happen in the midst of thought?

Yes, thinking, too, is still. Thinking, too, is an empty and total appearance. It is the "thinker" who is illusory. This thinker experiences itself as separate from thoughts. Normally, the thinker longs for a still, resting arrival and tries to put an end to thinking. How many people live in the illusion of suffering from their thoughts and the feelings that go with them. Yet because a thinking brain belongs to the natural appearance – and is a sign that one is still alive – thinking itself cannot be switched off, nor does it need to be. Thoughts are just as much a part of natural reality as anything else. Yet no answer to the personal search for fulfilment can be found in thought. While the I suffers from its stream of thought, it simultaneously fuels that stream by trying, through thinking, to find an answer to the search. This search within thought often becomes overthinking. It is the search for a deeper truth in thoughts that binds the I to them. It can neither let them go nor use them to achieve personal fulfilment.

6. Is the so-called "working of nothingness" for you a synonym for consciousness – or does it lie beyond even that concept, like a state prior to all perception?

Natural reality is neither conscious nor unconscious. It simply is. At the same time, it is not, for there is no natural reality that can be grasped in any way. As a concept, one could say that it lies "prior to all perception". In that sense, there is no real experience of being conscious. Consciousness belongs to appearance and is never real in the sense in which it seems real from within I-experience. "Being" and "nothingness" are undivided and cannot be considered separately.

7. If freedom does not lie in choosing – perhaps not even in a recognition that could belong to someone – what remains of responsibility, ethics and compassion?

Freedom lies in the melting away of separate experiencing. It is the impression of being a separate I that contains the impression of imprisonment. Yet this is not a personal experience of freedom. This freedom therefore has nothing to do with the freedom the I is seeking. Responsibility, ethics and morality reveal themselves as mental constructions that the I devises in order to contain the wildness of life within a conceptual framework. These concepts seem to provide support and orientation, while in fact confirming the feeling of imprisonment. Natural reality requires no concepts.

Compassion I would regard somewhat differently. Our bodies seem naturally compassionate and loving. Yet this compassion has nothing to do with the pity that, within I-experience, is often confused with compassion. Many people have a kind of understanding for the suffering that arises from separate experiencing because they themselves suffer under the same dynamic. If someone suffers from not yet being fulfilled, many people can identify with that and, in a sense, suffer along with them because they are having the same experience. They suffer with the

illusion because they themselves take it to be real. Compassion in natural reality is spontaneous and direct. It is an apparent capacity of our bodies and seems to be sharpened rather than diminished when the I-illusion falls away. In this falling away, our natural humanness reveals itself as complete. Nothing human is foreign to the apparently liberated one; nothing human is excluded or condemned.

8. The chapter ends: "A dance without a dancer, a sound without a musician – and yet: everything is music." If everything is music, who or what hears it?

No one hears the music of Being. Being is a concert that plays for itself. One might also say that Being is everything at once: the concert, the musicians, the listeners, the instruments and even the concert hall. All these separate aspects reveal themselves as undivided no-thing. Unconditioned and unexperienced, they are the undivided natural reality that neither experiences nor knows itself, and yet somehow is. Nothing stands outside this reality. This boundlessness is what we are, without having an experience of it.