



Beyond No Self

An Excerpt from That is That: Essays About True Nature

by Nirmala

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Beyond No Self

The spiritual journey is a movement away from over-identification with the body and mind to the rediscovery of our true identity as infinite Being, and this can be two different movements. The first movement is dis-identification with the body and mind. Since identification is just a movement of thought, dis-identification is simply a movement away from thought. The ego identification that we experience most of the time is the result of repeated thoughts about “I,” “me,” and “mine.” That is all there is to it, but while we are thinking these thoughts the sense of self is contained in them. And since most of our self-referencing thoughts are about our body, our thoughts, our feelings, and our desires, the sense of self is usually contained in the body and mind.

Dis-identification from the thought form of the ego can occur whenever there is a deep questioning of the assumption that is present in most of our thoughts that we are the body and the mind. Inquiry using the question, "Who am I?" can naturally weaken the assumption that we are the body and the mind. In fact, any deep questioning of our thoughts and assumptions can loosen our over-identification with thought, since so many of our thoughts aren't very true. Experiences of no thought can also weaken this identification because in the absence of thought, is an absence of identification. We all experience this when we get so caught up in what we are doing that we completely “forget ourselves.”

Alternatively, sensing the Presence that is aware of the thoughts can also disentangle us from the tendency to identify with our thoughts. The second movement of the spiritual journey is this recognition, or realization, of our true nature as Presence, or limitless Awareness. It is a wonderful surprise to

discover that everything that really matters in life, including peace, joy, and love, is found in this empty Awareness. This emptiness is incredibly full and rich. It has intelligence, strength, and compassion. Whenever we experience a deeper quality of Being, such as clarity, peace, satisfaction, value, happiness, or love, it's coming from this spacious Presence.

The surprising thing is that while these two movements can occur simultaneously, they can also happen apart from each other. When this happens, the movement from ego identification to our essential nature is incomplete. Although it's a profound insight and a huge relief to discover, by examining and questioning our thoughts, that we are not the body or the mind (after all, if I'm not my body, then these aren't my aches and pains; and if I'm not my mind, then these aren't my problems), by itself this insight only reveals our false assumptions, not the truth about who we really are. So it's possible to dissolve the ego by seeing through the mind without actually experiencing our true nature, which is a Heart-centered experience. In a sense, you can wake up out of your mind but not be in your Heart.

When this happens, there is a sense of relief from all the grief caused by over-identification with the body and mind but also often a deep sense of meaninglessness: If *I* don't exist, then what's the point? It doesn't matter anymore what the fictional *I* does or what happens to it. In fact, it feels like nothing matters at all because everything is so clearly an illusion.

When seekers are led or just find their own way to a deep experience of no self, they can then form a new, more subtle belief that this absence of self is all there is. "I'm not my body, I'm not my mind, I don't exist" are seen as the final conclusions. From a purely logical perspective, what more is there to say, since there's no one here to say it or hear it! And while these conclusions are true, they aren't the *whole* truth.

Underlying all the mind's activity is the non-conceptual reality of Being, or our true nature. It is a pure, empty, aware space that is full of the subtle substance of Presence and all of its essential qualities: peace, joy, love, clarity, strength, value, and much more. How can that be—empty space that is full of everything that matters? The mind can't grasp it fully, as Presence exists beyond concepts. And yet, that is what we really are. We experience it with more subtle senses than the physical senses and the mind. We “sense” it by being it. We just are this full, yet empty, Presence.

It is this second movement of realization of Presence that counteracts the belief that since I (as ego) don't exist, therefore nothing exists and everything is an illusion. The realization of Presence, or Essence, gives back to our life a heartfelt sense of meaning and purpose, which becomes a pure expression of the wonder and beauty of this deeper reality. Instead of living a life in service to the ego's wants and needs, we are moved to fulfill the deepest purpose of a human life: to serve and express freedom, joy, beauty, peace and love. By itself, the realization of no self can end up dry and lifeless, but when the Heart opens wide to the greater truth of the true Self, life is anything but dry and lifeless.

The opposite can also occur: Our awareness can move into pure Presence and be filled with a sense of the limitless goodness of our true nature. And while any experience of our true nature does, to some extent, loosen the identification with the limited idea of ourselves that we call the ego, an experience of our true nature by itself doesn't always dissolve the ego completely. Having a profound experience of our true nature doesn't take away our capacity to identify. It doesn't render us incapable of thought. We can still return to thinking of ourselves as a limited self—but one that has now tasted our true nature.

So, after such an experience, if the habit of identification with the body and mind does continue, it may still be necessary to deconstruct the mistaken beliefs related to ego identification. There's a place for inquiring into the false beliefs and assumptions of our identification with the body and mind, and a place for inquiring into the underlying reality. The difference is that inquiry into our true nature isn't a purely mental activity. Because of the subtle nature of Presence, the inquiry has to be subtle and wholehearted. To discover what's really here requires subtlety, patience, persistence, courage, tenderness, compassion, curiosity, and ultimately everything you've got! The momentum of our usual identification with thoughts and physical reality shapes our perception to such a great degree that breaking through to the more subtle dimensions of perception can be a challenge.

It helps to pursue the inquiry into true nature with both the Heart and the body. The mind's view is so easily distorted by belief and conditioning that the experience beneath the shoulders is often a more direct and open doorway into Presence. What are you experiencing right now in your shoulders? In your heart? In your belly? What is the space around your arms and legs like right now? Is there energy flowing in your body right now? Questions like these can direct you to a more fruitful exploration, especially if you ask them with your whole being and not just with your mind.

It is a saving grace that this deeper reality is always present. Sometimes it only touches us in an unguarded moment of deep loss or profound beauty. In the end, there's no escaping from the truth. Illusions come and go, beliefs come and go, but the underlying Presence remains.

To experience Presence, all we have to do is stop believing in our thoughts and sense our being. It is really that simple, although doing this isn't necessarily easy. One of the things that makes experiencing Presence a

challenge is the sense of identity we naturally have. Anytime we add something to the statement “I am,” as in “I am scared” or “I am a bird watcher,” our identity moves into that thought. This is what it means to identify with thought. A thought by itself has little power or significance. But a thought that begins with “I” or “I am” or one that is about me, my possessions, or my experience evokes a sense of identity. It's as if our true nature moves into or tries on the shape and feel of the thought. Dissolving or deconstructing the thoughts that we identify with can free our essential identity from an assumption that it is somehow contained in our body or our mind. Seeing the falseness of those ideas opens the door for our deepest sense of our own existence to move out of the tight confines of our beliefs and ego identifications.

Often when the sense of self is set free from the structures of ego-centered thought, it naturally expands into a full experience of true nature. We call a sudden expansion into true nature like this an awakening, as it seems we have awakened to a whole new reality that is rich and full of joy, peace, and love.

However, then it is possible for the sense of self, or identity, to move into a different belief or an assumption of no self. This happens most often when the focus of a teaching or inquiry is on the negation of false identifications, without a counter-balancing emphasis on the underlying reality of Presence. Some spiritual practices are specifically designed to negate false identifications, such as the practice of seeing that you are not this and not that until nothing is left. Some spiritual teachers and teachings emphasize the non-existence of a separate individual and go on to suggest that not only is the individual not real, but the world and everything in it is also not real.

There is a profound truth in this perspective, as it penetrates and dissolves

the usual belief or assumption that the ego, our thoughts, and physical reality are more real than more subtle levels of reality. Even when we have tasted a deeper reality, we often return to an ego-centered perspective because of the momentum of our involvement with the physical and mental realms. Even in the face of profound experiences to the contrary, there's a habit of assuming that our physical body and our beliefs and other thoughts are what is most important, so much so that we think that everything that pops into our heads is important. We even use the argument, "That's what I think" to justify our position, as if thinking something makes it true. Since our most common thought or assumption is the assumption that "I am the body" or "I am my thoughts, feelings, and desires," this pointing to the falseness or incompleteness of those most basic beliefs is vitally important to loosening the grip of the ego.

However, in the absence of the experience of our true nature, there is this danger of the sense of self simply landing on a new belief in no self. The sense of self moves from a limited and painful identification with the mind's idea of who you are to a more open and freeing idea of emptiness and non-existence. While this may be a relief, it can eventually be just as limiting as the original ego identification. When our sense of self has identified with nothingness, emptiness, or no self, we can become stuck there. This is often reflected in a kind of defensiveness of this new identification: Anytime you are challenged, you deflect the criticism or conflict by retreating more fully into the idea of no self. Or you turn the tables on those challenging you and try to convince them that they don't exist, therefore their concerns aren't valid. This new identification with no self can feel flat, dry, and detached. Life feels like it has no meaning or value. So what was once a helpful and freeing dissolving of limiting structures has become a new fossilized and

limiting identity.

Because it is your essential identity or sense of self that moves into or identifies with the concept of emptiness or no self, it is a very convincing new identification. Whenever identity moves into an experience, it doesn't just experience it but actually becomes it to a degree. When your sense of self is firmly planted in the body and egoic mind, it feels like that is who you are. And when, instead of just experiencing emptiness, your identity or sense of self moves fully into emptiness or no self, it also is very convincingly felt as who you are. When you move so fully into identification with something that it no longer feels like an experience but who you really are, the experience becomes more global and convincing.

This is the power of identification to make an egoic thought and the false self, or ego, seem more real than it is. The power of identification can also make the dry emptiness and meaninglessness of no self seem more real. They are both illusions, but it is through identification that illusions are made to seem real. Being or consciousness is ultimately the one that is identifying, and when limitless eternal Being identifies to create illusion, it does a good job of it!

However, no matter how powerful the illusion of the egoic self or no self is when we are identified with it, identification is still simply a movement of thought followed by a movement of our sense of self into that thought. Since thought is always a temporary phenomenon, no identification is ever permanent. In fact, every identification only lasts as long as the thought triggering it. We become “stuck” in identification by repeating a lot of similar thoughts. The sense of an egoic self or no self are both created by a pattern of repeated thoughts that identity moves into.

Because this movement of thought is temporary, there is always, in every

moment, the possibility of touching the deeper reality of our true nature. What is even more amazing is when, with repeated experiences of our true nature, our identity, or sense of self, moves into the realm of essential reality. Eventually it becomes obvious that Presence is actually who we are. When our identity moves into our true nature, there is no suffering and no dryness or emptiness. We simply are all of the peace, joy, and love in the universe.

There is nothing you can do to move your identity, or sense of self, into your true nature. Identity isn't something you do; it is what you are. However, the sense of identity follows your awareness, and since you are ultimately everything, it can and will identify with whatever is in your awareness. This is the danger of a teaching that doesn't point to or convey the existence of true nature. If something isn't even talked about or considered, it's much less likely that awareness will notice it and that identity will shift into it. This is why it's important to teach and explore all the qualities of Presence, such as joy, peace, and love, so that awareness begins to touch them and identity eventually shifts to the underlying truth of Being.

A subtle distinction needs to be made between your true identity and the sense of self you have in any moment. Your true identity has and always will be the infinite spaciousness of Being, including all forms, both physical and subtle, and all of the formless emptiness of pure space. But your sense of self is a flexible means for this limitless Being to experience itself from many different perspectives. By having this ability to move in and out of all kinds of experiences and appear to become them by identifying with them, Being gets to try on many different experiences or illusions, from the most contracted and limited to the most expanded and blissful. Without this capacity, Being would be a static existence of infinite potential that is never

expressed. By moving its identity into and identifying with the myriad perspectives of limited experience, this potential becomes experienced in form and movement.

So while mis-identification is the root of all your “problems,” it isn't and never has been a mistake. Being has very purposefully shifted its identity in and out of infinite apparent selves to try them all on for size. Being stuck in identification is itself an illusion, since all identification is temporary. Every expression of life is an expression of the right way to be, if the right way to be is simply to express our limitless capacity to experience identification and dis-identification, form and formlessness. The deepest, fullest experience of anything is to become it, and that is what Being has been up to all along.

The ultimate freedom is the discovery that it is fine to identify and dis-identify. True freedom demands no limits, not even limits against limitation. Since Being itself is completely free and cannot be harmed, it has been endlessly exploring every possibility of that freedom. This perspective will allow you to hold everything, even the spiritual journey, lightly. The goal is and always has been the journey itself. You can be curious about this whole process of identification with the ego, with no self, and with true nature simply for its own sake. It is a rich and mysterious world of perception and reality that we as consciousness inhabit. Why not taste it all? Life is and has always been this endless movement in and out of identification, in and out of forms and formlessness.

Finally, here is a short fairy tale about Being, which captures some of this freedom in a story:

Once upon no time, there was an infinite and eternal Being. Needless to say this was one big Being. Being infinite and eternal meant that no

matter where or when it went, there it was. And of course, anything that big was made of empty space, as space is the only thing big enough to be that infinite.

While space is a wonderfully low maintenance thing to be, since it can't be harmed, this Being still had a problem: There was no one else. Since it was already everywhere and every-when, there was no place or time for anyone else. It was not a horrible problem, but still there was no one else to talk to, dance with, or play with.

What's an infinite Being to do? It can't really just create lesser beings inside of itself as that would not be very interesting to an infinite Being. For a truly infinite and eternal being to create little lesser beings to play with would be like you or me making dolls to play with as an adult. There's nothing wrong with that, but that's not very interesting after a while.

Then it had a great idea! Being infinite meant it also had infinite potential, so rather than create lesser beings, it decided to create more infinite beings. At first this would seem impossible since there is the question of where would you put another infinite Being? There already is no space left over once you have one infinite Being. But the great thing about space is that it is completely empty as long as it's pure space or pure potential, so two spaces can actually occupy the same space!

That was the solution! So Being created an infinite number of infinite space Beings just like itself. In a sense, Being cloned itself. Now, rather than having just a wind-up doll version of a Being to relate to, it had real, fully amazing infinite Beings like itself to relate to.

Even better, it quickly discovered that as long as one of the infinite space Beings stayed "home" as infinite space to hold the endless

universes in place, then all of the rest were free to contract into all kinds of shapes and sizes. In fact, all a Being of infinite potential has to do to contract into a different shape or size is think about it, and voila it happens! That's the power of infinite potential!

Now not only could all these infinite Beings hang out as one very big space (which of course really meant hanging out as one Being, since two spaces in the same space are really still just one space), they could also play at contracting into all kinds of lesser expressions of their infinite potential.

Now why would they want to do that? Why would something infinite want to experience being less than its infinite self? Well remember these Beings are not only infinite, but also eternal, and eternity is a very long time! That means they all had a lot of time to kill. What does it matter if you spend a little time experiencing yourself as less than your complete potential, especially if you can do an entire eon standing on your head and still have all the time in the world?

And so Being, as many Beings, was now free to talk, dance, create, and play in all kinds of crazy wonderful ways because now there was someone else to talk, dance, create, and play with. Party time!!!

Ever since, it has been discovering all of the different things it can identify with and temporarily become and all of the truly strange and amazing things it can do once it has become less than itself. Infinite space can't really play soccer or be a super nova or fall in love or have its heart broken or create a new universe or fly a kite when it's expanded into its original nature as infinite space, but if it contracts into a form or expression of itself, then it can do all of that and more!

So that is what it's been up to ever since, and it's really just getting

started, since it still has so much time on its hands; the rest of eternity is still a very long time. That is also why it's so amazing to relate to others: because it is never some lesser incomplete being across the table from you. It is always an infinite Being with infinite potential that you are talking to or playing with. No wonder they are so convincing in their role as an apparent separate individual. It is really God playing that role. There are only Gods upon Gods upon Gods being everybody and everything and doing everything that is done! That is what we all are.

Pretty clever solution if you want to have some fun, don't you think?

CONTACT INFORMATION

For information about Nirmala's satsang* schedule and to download free copies of his other books and publications, visit:

www.endless-satsang.com

You can contact Nirmala at *Nirmalanow@aol.com*.

For information about Nirmala's teacher, Neelam, visit: www.neelam.org.

For information about Nirmala's teacher, Adyashanti, visit: www.adyashanti.org.

For information about Nirmala's wife's books, visit www.radicalhappiness.com.

Nirmala has also been profoundly inspired by the teachings of A.H Almaas and his work, The Diamond Approach: www.ahalmaas.com.

* *Satsang* is a Sanskrit word that means coming together to speak about and share Truth.

About Nirmala

After a lifetime of spiritual seeking, Nirmala met his teacher, Neelam, a devotee of H.W.L. Poonja (Papaji). She convinced Nirmala that seeking wasn't necessary; and after experiencing a profound spiritual awakening in India, he began offering satsang and Nondual Spiritual Mentoring with Neelam's blessing. This tradition of spiritual wisdom has been most profoundly disseminated by Ramana Maharshi, a revered Indian saint, who was Papaji's teacher.

Nirmala offers a unique vision and a gentle, compassionate approach, which adds to this rich tradition of inquiry into the truth of Being. He is also the author of several books including *Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self*. He has been offering satsang throughout the United States and Canada since 1998. Nirmala lives in Sedona, Arizona with his wife, Gina Lake.

About Nondual Spiritual Mentoring

Nondual Spiritual Mentoring with Nirmala is available to support you in giving attention and awareness to the more subtle and yet more satisfying inner dimensions of your being. Whether it is for a single spiritual mentoring session or for ongoing one-to-one spiritual guidance, this is an opportunity for you to more completely orient your life towards the true source of peace, joy, and happiness, especially if there is not ongoing satsang or other support available in your location. As a spiritual teacher and spiritual mentor, Nirmala has worked with thousands of individuals and groups around the world to bring people into a direct experience of the spiritual truth of oneness beyond the illusion of separation. He especially enjoys working with individuals in one-to-one sessions because of the greater depth and intimacy possible.

Mentoring sessions with Nirmala are an opportunity for open-ended inquiry. In your session, you can ask any questions, raise any concerns that are meaningful to you, or simply explore your present moment experience, which is a powerful doorway into a deeper reality. Regular weekly, biweekly, or monthly mentoring sessions can be especially transformative.

These mentoring sessions are offered either in person or over the phone and typically last an hour. You can contact Nirmala using the form on: <http://endless-satsang.com/spiritual-mentoring-arrange-a-session.htm> to arrange a time for a spiritual mentoring session. Please include your phone number and location in your message. At the arranged time, Nirmala will call you if you live in the United States or Canada.

Free E-books by Nirmala

The following PDF e-books and book excerpts are available for free from <http://endless-satsang.com/free-spiritual-ebooks.htm>:

Part Two of *Living From the Heart*

(Download part two for free at <http://endless-satsang.com/free-spiritual-ebooks.htm>. The entire book is also available on Amazon.com for \$11.95)

A collection of teachings about the Heart, including:

**Part one: From the Heart: Dropping out of Your Mind and Into Your Being*

Offers simple ways to shift into a more open and accepting perspective and to experience your true nature as aware space.

**Part two: The Heart's Wisdom*

Points the reader back to the Heart, the truest source of wisdom.

**Part three: Love Is for Giving, Not for Getting*

Points to the true source of love in your own heart. It is by giving love that we are filled with love.

Here are some excerpts:

“The Heart is wise and accurate and can show you how true it is to stay or go, how true it is to buy a house, how true it is to take a new job, even how true it is to eat another cookie. But it also can show you much more of the possibilities inherent in this life and much more of the truth of your ultimate Being. In relation to these bigger truths, the practical questions of your life turn out to be relatively small matters. Using your Heart only to know things like what to do or where to live is like using a global positioning satellite system to find the way from your bedroom to your bathroom; it utilizes only a small part of your Heart’s capacity.

However, following your Heart day in and day out can put you in touch with the richness of the functioning of this dimension of your Being. Along the way, you may also find your Heart opening in response to the deeper movements of Being that touch every life.”

“In the midst of a very profound and large experience of truth, the sense of your self can become so large and inclusive that it no longer has much of a sense of being your Being. When you awaken to the oneness of all things, the sense of a me can thin out quite dramatically. If you are the couch you are sitting on and the clouds in the sky and everything else, then it simply doesn’t make sense to call it all me. If it’s so much more than what you usually take yourself to be, then the term me is just too small.

In a profound experience of truth, the sense of me softens and expands to such a degree that there’s only a slight sense of me as a separate self remaining, perhaps just as the observer of the vastness of truth. Beyond these profound experiences of the truth, is the truth itself. When you’re in touch with the ultimate truth and the most complete sense of Being, there’s nothing separate remaining to sense itself there’s no experience and no experiencer, no Heart, and no sense of self. There is only Being.”

“You may think it matters what happens. But what if the only thing that matters is where you are experiencing from, where you are looking from? What if you could experience all of life from a spacious, open perspective where anything can happen and there is room for all of it, where there is no need to pick and choose, to put up barriers or resist any of it, where nothing is a problem and everything just adds to the richness of life? What if this open, spacious perspective was the most natural and easy thing to do?

It may sound too good to be true, but we all have a natural capacity to experience life in this way. The only requirement is to look from the Heart instead of from the eyes and the head—and not just to look, but to listen and feel and sense from the Heart.

In some spiritual traditions you are encouraged to look in your Heart, and yet what does that mean exactly? Often we are so used to looking and sensing through the head and the mind that when we are asked to look in the Heart, we look *through* the head into the Heart to see what is there. Usually we end up just thinking about the Heart. But what if you could drop into the Heart and look from there? How would your life look right now? Is it possible that there is another world right in front of you that you can only see with the Heart and not with the mind?

This book invites you to explore this radically different perspective and to find out what is true and real when the world and your life are viewed from the Heart of Being. It may both delight and shock you to find that so much richness and wonder and beauty lie so close and are so immediately available to you.”

Free Ebooks continued:

That Is That: Essays about True Nature

(Download the entire book for free at <http://endless-satsang.com/free-spiritual-ebooks.htm>. A paperback version is also available from Amazon.com for \$11.95)

That Is That: Essays About True Nature is a collection of articles and answers to questions posed by spiritual seekers. It captures the essence of spiritual inquiry and provides the reader with a real transmission of Presence on every page. It is much more than an exposition about our true nature as infinite consciousness, it offers an experiential exploration of who we really are, not only through the transmission in the words, but through the many thoughtful questions it raises. Nirmala's warm-hearted and accepting presence makes it possible to drop into the space he so eloquently describes, where peace, love, and joy abide. He is a master at helping you fall in love with life and the many expressions of the one Being we all are.

Gifts With No Giver: A Love Affair with the Truth

(Download the entire book for free at <http://endless-satsang.com/free-spiritual-ebooks.htm>. A paperback version is also available from Amazon.com for \$9.95)

A collection of non-dual poetry by Nirmala. Here is a sample poem:

*every taste
every sensation
every possible pleasure
is already present
in the timeless
awareness
that is beating my heart
what use
in chasing dreams
that have already
come true*

Part One of Nothing Personal, Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self

(Download part one for free at <http://endless-satsang.com/free-spiritual-ebooks.htm>. The whole book is also available on Amazon.com as a paperback for \$16.95)

In this concisely edited collection of satsang talks and dialogues, Nirmala “welcomes whatever arises within the field of experience. In the midst of this welcoming is always an invitation to inquire deeply within, to the core of who and what you are. Again and again, Nirmala points the questions back to the questioner and beyond to the very source of existence itself—to the faceless awareness that holds both the question and the questioner in a timeless embrace.” –From the Foreword by Adyashanti.

“*Nothing Personal* is an excellent book, very clear and warm-hearted. I love it and recommend it highly. Nirmala is a genuine and authentic teacher, who points with great clarity to the simplicity and wonder of nondual presence. He invites you to ‘say yes to the mystery of every moment.’ Good stuff!”—Joan Tollifson, Advaita teacher and author of *Awake in the Heartland*