

At the time of the interview John David was sixty years old and traveled constantly through Europe giving meetings. He sees himself as a messenger for the ancient wisdom gathered from his Indian Masters, Osho, Papaji and Ramana Maharshi and his years living in Japan immersing himself in the eastern culture, particularly Zen. This interview was conducted by six of his close students in November 2005.

### **What does Being Quiet mean?**

By following a technique like Zazen or Vipassana you come to Stillness or Peace. What I'm suggesting is that without any kind of technique you can simply be quiet. As you close your eyes and be quiet you become aware of a lot of thoughts and feelings. After some time you start to notice gaps between the thoughts, just brief moments of Stillness. Focusing on these gaps the thoughts and feelings are far away and you become aware of a vast expanded space inside, without boundaries. Be quiet has the power, by absolutely doing nothing, to bring you to your True Nature. When you stay longer in this be quiet you find suddenly a tremendous Oneness and Love which is just there, overwhelmingly there. Be quiet is not a practice. It is just a signpost guiding you to your True Nature. Your True Nature is always there present. We lose touch with it because we get preoccupied with the conditioned mind and all the exciting movies that the conditioned mind is offering.

### **Can you please give advice on how to bring Stillness into my life?**

If you are a complete beginner then probably the first step is a spiritual practice that will quieten your mind; something like meditation, breath work or mantra singing. Once you have achieved this quiet mind then just naturally there comes a greater longing inside to know Stillness.

Self-Enquiry can help you come into this Stillness. As you go through your daily life, whatever you're thinking or doing, simply ask, To whom do these thoughts arise or Who is doing this? The answer, of course, is Me. Then ask, Who is this me, who am I? This second question (no intellectual answer helps) takes you back inside to the Source and the Source is Stillness. Self-Enquiry provides a constant reminder that you can in fact disengage from your thoughts and dramas and you can come back to the Source of that, which is the Stillness.

### **Is there a particular Premananda teaching?**

I don't see there being any kind of special Premananda teaching. The things that are said in the Satsang meetings are more by way of being a messenger. For twenty years I've had a strong connection with Ramana Maharshi. I spent fifteen years with Osho and five years with Papaji. These three people have been guides or messengers of the ancient Indian wisdom and now I see myself as a messenger of that wisdom as I travel through Europe. Naturally I have my own unique way to explain and create the channel for this message. Something that's uniquely Premananda is that I've developed a number of different intensive weekends which provide an opportunity to look at different aspects of the journey.

### **Can you explain how people sabotage themselves?**

I've had many meetings and met probably thousands of people in Europe. Often people come very enthusiastic and open to one or two evenings. Maybe they get some information or knowledge and feel that's enough for them. Maybe they have a judgment about the teacher or aren't so interested in the subject anyway.

Others become more involved in the work and more deeply affected by the contact with the teacher. Very often when these people come close to some deep understanding, to Awakening, they suddenly disappear.

As you come very close to Awakening, what you are faced with is that everything you believe to be yourself is simply not true. As you begin to see and understand this illusion, you also start to see that this is a kind of death. There is a fear that if you would really let go deeply, then a lot would change; you would lose everything you think of as yourself or everything on the outside. There is the idea that you might not be able to maintain your apartment, your job,

your family. This deep fear is a natural part of the conditioned mind and so to have this fear is also a sign that the person has got close to a true understanding.

In certain cities where many teachers are coming, people will go from one meeting to the next without ever making a commitment or surrendering to one teacher. I would suggest that people absolutely surrender to one teacher. If you're interested, go and sit in other meetings and enjoy the support that they give you, but keep your main spiritual work to the one who naturally came into your life as your Master. Deal with what it means to surrender to that one Master and go really deep with that Master. The thing which prevents deep understanding is an attachment to a story which perhaps only someone on the outside can actually reflect. So it's very important to have a deep enough connection with a Master that he is going to reflect to you whatever it might be that is covering a clear understanding.

### **What does Awakening mean?**

I'm using the word Awakening for a moment of Ah hah! and in this moment of Ah hah! you see without any doubt that you were never the story, My Life. You see that this story, My Life was, in fact, a total illusion created inside the conditioned mind and has no reality. Usually this happens very suddenly and unexpectedly. There is this glimpse, Ah hah! and in that moment the whole illusion simply collapses and you find yourself just sitting there in Stillness, in Nothingness, in No-Mind, in the Self. I would call that kind of moment to be an Awakening. It's Awakening out of the illusion.

### **What happens after Awakening?**

It's a very individual thing. You could say that often after this moment of Ah hah! there is a period of hours, days, maybe months where the person is in a kind of hot energetic happening. Some people simply can't function very well during that time. They feel to be quiet and alone. They feel a bit to withdraw from the world. Usually in this hot period there would be a lot of ecstasy inside. There can be a big difference between what's going on inside and what it looks like on the outside.

Then things become more cool and more ordinary. You could even say very ordinary. There's a big difference, because now although everything is kind of ordinarily - trees still look like trees, cars still look like cars - but suddenly everything seems a bit far away. Nothing is so immediate anymore. You are just the observer of a film and you're not really so attached anymore to this film; you don't feel connected to these stories.

After this initial hot period where there may be absolutely no-mind for some period, it gets to be cool. Then some of the familiar old structures will come back, but now with a distance so that you're not so attached to those structures. You start to be aware of those structures not as my structure but just as structures. It seems that just by the Awareness of these structures, which in Hindi are called vasanas, the bite goes and they disappear.

There is some movement between Awakening and Freedom. I would define Awakening as the moment of understanding that I am not this story, My Life, that it was always an illusion, and Freedom as a moment when these structures have really calmed down and mostly disappeared. Freedom is then existing in presence, moment by moment. You are free of these old conditioned structures. You are simply living in the vastness of Stillness and life unfolds. It doesn't mean that every moment is blissful. It means that you simply are there, present and dealing with life as you confront it, as you meet it.

### **Can I still function in the world after Awakening?**

It may be during the hot period and just in the immediate aftermath of an Awakening, that you can't function. But very quickly you can function very well, even better because you are not carrying this load of old stories and you meet each moment fresh, spontaneous and available.

So there is absolutely no problem to function in the world, but there may be less desire to function in the world. It's very likely that after Awakening there are changes, even major changes in your lifestyle because there is less interest in relationships or in working in a situation which you never really liked. So you let it go and something else happens. For example, a number of people have chosen to come and live here in our community after they had their Awakening.

## **Can you Awaken and still have a girlfriend? Can you Awaken with a girlfriend?**

Well, there are two questions here.

Before Awakening the whole effort is to see the story and to become clear of it. When you have a girlfriend, you have your story and then you have the girlfriend's story and then you have the relationship story. So suddenly there are three stories to become clear of. So you could say being in relationship makes it more complicated. It's rather easy to have a girlfriend or boyfriend after Awakening because you're not really attached to the girlfriend or boyfriend's story anymore, but in fact you might not be so interested. You probably won't be interested in having a relationship in the conventional sense, where there is a big story and both partners are trying to maintain this story. That will probably just drop away, but relating becomes easier. So you might find yourself relating with many people and even in a deeply intimate way, but not in the old, more traditional kind of relationship drama.

Most Awakened people probably live alone. That may be changing in the last years as more Western people have come into this because Western people have more pull to be in relationship. Traditionally in the East, people who went on the spiritual path tended to be celibate and so would be less involved in relationship.

Having said all that, there is an exception. When both partners are interested in Truth, when Awakening is the first priority in the relationship, and when both partners are supporting and mirroring each other, then it can also be a supportive thing to have a girlfriend.

## **So I can use a girlfriend to become Awakened?**

If you are very clear, yes, you could use your girlfriend to become Awakened. But there is always the danger that you'll be so attached to the girlfriend that she will take you away from the interest in Awakening.

One of the common ways people sabotage is that just before the Awakening, when they seem to be very close to understanding they suddenly decide that the new girlfriend or boyfriend is much more important than this Awakening and they disappear off into this new relationship.

Traditionally in the spiritual life in the East, the advice is to be celibate. Being celibate means not only do you not have sex, but you also don't have a relationship. In the West almost nobody would be ready for celibacy and so my own advice would be to stay single and to relate from being single rather than to get caught up in a dramatic story with somebody.

## **What is the most important thing for the Awakening then?**

In the end, the Awakening doesn't come from any teaching. In the end, the Awakening seems to be coming, you could say, by Grace. It just happens. The most important thing is that you make yourself the most available to Grace. Attending Satsang meetings, having a teacher, associating with friends who are also interested, these kinds of things give you the best chance of Grace happening. But this Grace also happens just spontaneously to very innocent people.

## **Many people have ideas of perfection which they project onto the teacher. How to know who is the right teacher?**

Most spiritual seekers are looking for a Master who is a bit special, who is a bit different from them. Masters who appear in wonderful clothes, stepping out of shiny motorcars and standing on marble stages have a certain appeal because they seem to be extraordinary. But when you come to find your own Master, I think it just happens. When the longing inside you becomes so intense, then out of existence a Master suddenly appears. You know on some level inside that this is your Master. He may not be the Master you had been planning to have, he might not be perfect enough, he might not meet your ideas about how a Master should behave, but you feel inside you a deep connection. So even though the mind may be judging him and finding he doesn't meet your standard, inside there is a knowing that this is the person. I think that's the way it happens. Probably if it's a good Master he will never satisfy your ideas about how he should be because naturally he is living his life authentically according to how he feels to be and that's not going to be, of course, how anybody else would like him to be.

## **Does this mean if I find my teacher absolutely perfect then he is not the right teacher for me?**

The thing that's interesting is to see what it is about the Master that keeps on grabbing you. What is his imperfection that you most get most annoyed about? I remember in the beginning with Papaji it was very difficult for me because I'd been used to Osho who would arrive in a stretch Rolls Royce, stand on a white marble stage and wearing a beautiful gown. Suddenly here was Papaji arriving in a van, with tattoos on his arm, wearing an old un-ironed t-shirt and sitting on a wooden platform. Initially I found him a much less perfect Master than my first Master. But of course, quite quickly I saw this was just my own idea and I was able to let go of it. My idea was a bit ridiculous.

**Once a teacher has been found, what's the best way to behave for maximum benefit?**

There's no doubt about that. If you really long for Truth and if you are lucky to find your teacher, then the very best advice is to spend as much time as possible with that teacher. Take him for lunch, wash his clothes, find any possible way to serve him and to stay with him and be with him. That may be not so practical for many people so then I would suggest that as much as possible you stay and visit that teacher at regular enough intervals that he's always there inside you, he's always with you. Then when you think of that Master, whatever the question, whatever the situation is, somehow, the answer comes. By remembering the Master you are actually remembering your own True Nature and so it acts as a constant reminder to keep on the path, the pathless path because there is no real path. In many ways, the Master is a reminder.

**And what about surrender? What does it mean to surrender to a Master?**

Initially, when this longing is very strong and you're drawn to one Master, surrender means to bow down to that Master, to accept the Master. Bowing down does not necessarily mean physically bowing down on the outside, but it means a letting go inside into this relationship with the Master, to accept this relationship with the Master. To accept this person as Your Master is the meaning of surrender. But there is a deeper meaning and this deeper meaning is that the Master is the Self. So when you surrender to the Master you are not surrendering to the personality of the Master, you are surrendering to the Self. The Self of the Master and your Self are the same Self. So on a deeper level surrender actually means surrendering to your True Nature.

**You stayed five years with your Master, Papaji. Did you take him for lunch and wash his clothes?**

In my case, I didn't take him for lunch and wash his clothes because other people were doing that. But after I had been there about two or three months I had a meeting with him. He said, You can make a guest house for my people. That's what he asked me to do and so I did it for more than four years. I ran a big guest house so that people who were coming to visit him had somewhere to stay. In my daily life it became my priority. Every night I would be there as the host for dinner. I saw it as my role to take care of the guests.

I don't know what Papaji's intention was, but the result for me personally was to have a kind of constant laboratory. Every guest brought an opportunity for me to see Premananda's stuff!

I also served Papaji in other ways. For some time I ran a bookshop. Once I loaned Papaji my cat. That was a kind of funny story. So different things happened, you know. But basically for me my role seemed to be to have a guest house.

**So basically that means that the service is more important than the actual physical contact?**

I think it depends on the person. I think for some people they need to have the regular, physical contact and for other people it's more to do with service.

**Your tour plan is very busy and you are traveling most of the year, but also since last year you have a Satsang community at a farm in Germany. How do these two things work together?**

I came to Europe three years ago and I've been traveling intensely since then. It started in Germany, but now I'm traveling to most other European countries as well. Exactly a year ago, this Satsang community started rather spontaneously and unexpectedly out of a summer retreat. So now a year later, we're about fifteen people living together on a horse farm and this is my base.

At the moment I don't spend so much time there. I'm mostly travelling, but always rather connected to the community because there are always three or four people from the community traveling along with me. These people change throughout the year so everybody gets an opportunity to come on the Satsang tour. So there's a kind of deep connection between the community and the tour.

Also we have a Satsang office in the community which is organising and preparing the different meetings and retreats. The community gives a tremendous support to the Satsang tour with this organising. Also we have a wonderful Satsang room here in a beautiful old barn. It can probably seat about two hundred people. At Easter and in the summer we have a Satsang retreat here and along the way of my tour we have Retreat weeks at the community. People who I meet as I travel, if they are interested enough, can come and visit the community. We have Satsang together and they can decide if they are interested to come and live in the community.

So the tour and the community work very much together and provide a wonderful opportunity for people who are really hot about Awakening and maintaining Awakening. This is something quite new and I don't know how it will develop, this community, but it seems to provide a kind of refuge or retreat where people have more opportunity to be with themselves. They have more opportunity to see their stories because the people around them are not so interested in these stories. Of the fifteen people who live there four people are Awakened.

**The community flyer says that the only point of the community is Awakening. Can you comment on this?**

The point is to support Awakening and once Awakened, to support Freedom. This is a place for the few people who really want to Awaken or who have Awakened and see the value of living with a group of people who actually want to live this Awakening. It's one thing to Awaken and it's another thing to actually live the Awakening. You could say this community is a small oasis where people have a space and a support either to Awaken or to live the Awakening and both things are happening here.

That's the main point of the community and all the other points are less important. So we have no rules. There is a feeling to be vegetarian, but there isn't a rule that says you have to be vegetarian and so some people eat meat. There's a suggestion that we have a daily meditation together as a community, but some people don't come. In that way we don't want to become a kind of institution. We'd like to keep the place a bit chaotic, a bit intensive and fun. As it's in Germany this is a little remarkable, I think. I should also say it's probably only because we are in Germany that it can work because to maintain this community, the food, the shopping, the daily cleaning and washing and supporting Satsang, is a lot. It's a very intensive life.

We're not separate from life here in the community. The normal daily tasks are still happening. It's not some sort of esoteric community far away from life. It's absolutely in the life. But Awakened people are also just in the life. It's a nice idea that Awakened people are somehow other than human, but this is not true. It's just a wrong idea.

**Are there children in this community?**

Yes. At the moment we have four children and two babies. Previously, we also had a ninety year old grandmother. It's just a slice of life, happening here. The children have their own space, but they like to use the rest of the space too. Having these two babies has been a tremendous gift for everyone.

**Is it also possible for mothers to Awaken?**

Well, I remember when I was first with Osho, about thirty years ago. There was a question a bit like that, but the question was can women Awaken? So thirty years ago there was a kind of common belief that Awakening was only for men because all the Masters seemed to be men. Perhaps it was Osho's support for women that made women see that they can also Awaken.

It's absolutely clear that anybody can Awaken. There is no condition for Awakening. So you can Awaken having sex or not having sex. You can Awaken having a child or not having a child. You can Awaken working in the world. You can Awaken sitting in a cave. It's not depending on anything on the outside. Having said that, it is also true that sometimes mothers are very caught up egoistically with their child and so the attachment to the story is maybe greater for a mother with a child than somebody who is simply single. It's not intrinsic that a mother with a child can't Wake Up. Sitting here in this small group we have two mothers who have Awakened.

Little children remind you about Presence. In that sense having a child is a support because the child is a constant reminder of being Present. Unfortunately, many mothers get really caught up in the drama that happens between the child and the mother and so like relationship, you suddenly have two stories, plus the relationship of the mother and the child, three stories, to deal with. In that sense it's more difficult maybe.

### **How important is priority for this Awakening?**

Papaji used to say that the Truth was the final desire and then he would qualify that and say it's not really a desire, it's a longing. He used to say that all the other desires have to fall away before it's possible really to Awaken. Awakening is like the last longing. In being the last longing it's also the first priority. It seems to be very important that the focus and the longing inside are towards Truth. If that's not there then almost for sure something will deflect the interest, a new girlfriend, new boyfriend, whatever it is. And so I would say the longing for Truth is the most important.

### **You lived in India for many years with two Indian Masters. Now you are offering Satsang in Europe. What is the difference?**

When I was interested in searching for Truth thirty years ago it seemed to be necessary to go to the East. I started in Japan because I had some interest in Zen and while I was there the connection that brought me to an Indian ashram happened. So in my case I got to India through Japan. As far as I can see looking back thirty or forty years ago, most people who were interested in Truth would make a journey to the East. They would go to Tibet, to India, to Japan for Zen or they might go to Thailand for Buddhism. There was a pull to travel to the East and there weren't so many Western teachers. There were Gurdjieff and Krishnamurti, but they were quite rare. I would guess around the same time many Eastern teachers started also traveling to the West. When the Chinese occupied Tibet a lot of the Tibetan lamas and teachers left Tibet and have now traveled in the world and found their places. A lot of that Tibetan spiritual wisdom is now available in the West quite easily. Many Indian Masters also traveled in the West. There are a number of Western teachers who've been in the East and are now teaching in the West. So now if you are a young person in the West and you're interested in Truth you don't necessarily need to go to the East. So it's really a different situation from when I started thirty years ago.

The teachings have come from the East and so there is an attraction to go to the source of the teachings and to touch those traditions. So there is a pull to go to Zen in Japan or to Buddhism in Thailand or to Hinduism or Vedanta in India. I think many people still feel that pull to travel there. But there are a lot of good Western teachers now traveling in the West who speak the western languages. The Western teachers are also more in line with the culture and traditions of the West and so that can be an advantage.

There is something beautiful about traveling to these Eastern countries because there is such a tradition of devotional focus in the ordinary life that, in a way, is a wonderful support.

Just getting off the plane in India you immediately feel some kind of devotional energy and that opens something for Western people because we don't have that devotional tradition in the West. So I would say that it's a wonderful thing to make a pilgrimage to some country in the East. Many of the Western teachers also go with their students to the Eastern countries.

Anyway, the world situation has changed in the last thirty or forty years, so that in fact now it's much more of a global village, you can say, and so the divide between the East and the West is really changing. Materially the East is becoming just as technologically advanced as the West and the West becoming more spiritual. What would appear to be some kind of natural process is just happening year by year, that the people in the West who have come to a certain level of material richness, they are becoming more interested in the spiritual tradition of the East and

the people of the East have acquired or are acquiring the material wealth of the West. So countries like India and China they are becoming very modern, very materialistic and a little bit losing touch with their spiritual tradition. In the West people feel something empty. They have all the material possessions they could want and then what? Their life seems a bit empty and so that brings them to an interest in looking inside and finding their own True Nature.

**You were talking about surrendering to the teacher. Does it always mean to do what he teacher wants you to do?**

Basically, the teacher doesn't want you to do anything.

**But he often gives you some tasks to do.**

Yes, he may give you a task to do because that seems to be necessary in the flow of the life or he may think that task is going to be useful to you. If that's the case then it would help to say yes even when there may be something uncomfortable about that yes. The Master's whole effort is that you Awaken. That's his only interest. So if he is asking you to do something it's in the interest of this Awakening even though it may not appear like that and even though you may have a resistance to that. The whole effort is that you Awaken and then live that Awakening. If you have a strong resistance to something the teacher is asking, look at what that resistance is because that resistance is keeping you away from living the Truth. In Truth there is no resistance because you know it doesn't matter what you are doing on the outside. You are the Pure Awareness of what you are doing and it doesn't really matter what the body is doing on the outside because you are the Pure Awareness of that.

**Seems to me that you have a hard job. Why actually are you doing this? Because I think some people are really resistant and yes, the question is why?**

So the one who benefits most is the Master. It's not such a hard job when you look at it like that. The other thing I've noticed is that in the moments when the personal choice might have been to stop because it was simply too hard, always something really beautiful happened. I can think of many examples where it seemed to be really enough and then suddenly something so deeply touching would happen with somebody and then I would see, I can't stop. It's very strange because I think it's about eight years now since I started offering Satsang, and in this eight years there has not even been one week when there wasn't some kind of Satsang happening. It has it's own life you could say. Nobody is really doing this. There's not really any choice actually.

It started in a very strange way. I was living in Australia and I was having a Reiki weekend. On the Saturday lunchtime I went for a walk and I saw a street sign. It was Crystal Avenue and this reminded me of something I'd written to Papaji. It made a connection between myself and Papaji. Suddenly there was a kind of internal fax message. Out of this connection with Papaji there came quite a long message saying that I had some work to do. It felt a bit strange actually and I didn't give it so much serious attention. Later in the day I was doing some initiations and the message again started saying that this was my initiation and not really that I was initiating the students. On the next day some other stuff happened. So it was three messages. When I lived in Lucknow around Papaji I often got these kinds of messages when I wasn't physically with him. There would be some kind of inner message or inner knowing. It's hard to really describe it. About a week or two weeks later I got a phone call from a friend who told me that Papaji had died. I didn't know that. And when we checked out the time that he died and the time I got these strange messages it was exactly the same weekend. Due to the time difference between India and Australia it was almost exactly the same time. So then I got a different kind of feeling about these messages. They were the beginning of me offering Satsang. So I don't feel as if I personally chose to start giving Satsang.