

# The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** Greetings. Today I wanted to talk about something that I don't understand. For a while now, I've been asking people who come on the program and others, to define non-duality for me. I think at least seven podcast guests, most recently this week with Andrew Holecek. They're all thoughtful people.

[00:00:40] Some of them have spent decades inside that paradigm. And it dawned on me this morning, on a bike ride, which is usually where I get these, realizations, that every time I ask for that definition, I listen closely, I nod, I feel like I'm right at the cusp of understanding it, and then it's gone, and I walk away with my hands, empty, which is, I guess, why I've repeated the question at least seven times, to guests and others.

[00:01:21] I've assumed that the problem was me. I'm still not good enough. I have too many ADHD tendencies. I'm not advanced enough on my journey. I'm too impatient and the like. But this morning a different thought crept in. Maybe I keep failing to understand non-duality because I was raised in a way and grew up in a culture that makes it almost impossible to understand.

[00:01:56] I'm sure you've heard the old line about a fish that doesn't know what water is. The fish has never been dry, so wetness isn't a thing that it can point to. It's just the medium. To a fish, it's both everywhere and nowhere at once. And I suspect a lot of us in the West are like that fish. We're swimming in the very thing that makes non-duality invisible to us, and we can't see it because we've never once stepped out of it.

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[00:02:28] Let's start with our language. Listen to how I build a simple sentence. I see the tree. Three things just like that in our words, a watcher, an act of watching, and a thing being watched. We can barely open our mouths without sorting our world into someone and something and other various buckets.

[00:02:55] Our grammar is actually a little machine that generates separation. And then we reach for that same machine to try to understand a thing that has no cracks or seams in it at all for us to scrutinize and unpack. So we pick up the tool that builds the wall and we ask it, "Show us a place with no walls."

[00:03:30] and of course, it goes deeper than grammar. Everything around us in this culture is organized around the idea that we are each separate from someones. Your name and your resume and your achievements and your stuff in your garage and your credit score and your eventual death. From a time we're small, we are trained to become a self, a bounded little person standing slightly apart from everything else, looking out at the world and putting things into categories.

[00:04:10] And then non-duality comes along and whispers that this might have it backwards, or as my dad would say, bassackwards. That the self could be less of a thing watching from behind your eyes and more of a motion, something the whole universe is briefly simultaneously doing in the shape of you. So this morning it dawned on me that asking for a definition of non-duality was actually the wrong move, from the very beginning.

[00:04:48] Because to define something is to draw a line around it. This and not that. Inside that fence or outside that fence. And we need that skill of, for energy, for biophysical economics and finance. But the thing the wisdom traditions have been pointing at is the one thing that has no outside. There's nowhere to stand that isn't already part of it, so you can't fence it because the fence would be made

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of it, too. That's why, I have learned, the old teachers almost never define non-duality, rather they point.

[00:05:40] and, there's a phrase about a finger pointing at the moon and the warning not to confuse the finger for the moon. So as part of seven conversations, at least on this platform, I ask good people to define and hand me the moon, and they keep gently offering me a finger, and I keep picking up the finger and turning it over and studying it, asking why it doesn't look more like the moon I will be gentle here, on a late Thursday afternoon for me and for you because this might sound like I am describing a locked door to us, like it's hopeless for people like us in the West raised how we were.

[00:06:29] I don't think it is. This wall I'm describing that we build is real, but it's thin in certain places, and I think everyone listening to this platform has already stood in one of those thin places, possibly without naming it or understanding it. Probably many of you, don't stand within those walls, at all I talked about this a little last week.

[00:07:01] There is a moment when you're lost in a piece of music and the part of you that keeps track of yourself, the default mode network, just goes quiet. and there's that half second when you look up and see something, especially something beautiful, before your mind labels it, before the word arrives.

[00:07:27] and the- and then there's, grief, in my case, the recent loss of an animal that hollows you out so completely that the usual sense of some tidy little Nate running the show falls away. Certainly standing in a forest, at dusk when it gets hard to say where you stop and the rest of it, the trees, the soil, the birds, the, full ecosystem starts.

[00:08:02] Of course, none of that is proof, nor is it either a proper definition. Those are just the times and places where our separate self quietly goes offline

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for a moment, and we've all been there. We just don't usually reach for a Sanskrit word to describe a Thursday morning. That feeling of being a self sealed off, looking out at a world that's over there is actually a core theme of the work we're doing at this platform and part of, a central part of, I believe, what I'm referring to as a species level rite of passage, because it's of the same shape as feeling cut off from the living world.

[00:08:59] I am here. Nature is out there. nature's a backdrop, a resource, a pile of stuff waiting to be turned into something useful for our economy. And once you really believe all that, once it becomes wired in below your conscious level of thought, you can do almost anything to what's out there. You can clear it and drain it and burn it and eat it and feel nothing, because by definition it isn't you.

[00:09:33] So that wall not only confuses us, it also anesthetizes us. And I think so much of what we're living through these days might be sitting on top of that one piece of code that the Superorganism edited over, in our DNA, our cultural DNA, and the deep unquestioned sense that we are separate from the thing that grows our food, makes our oxygen, holds the biosphere steady enough for us all to exist and for future generations.

[00:10:08] We've built an entire civilization on the assumption that the world is a warehouse and we're the customers, and the bizarro part is, for those paying attention, the bills are coming due to a self that still thinks it's standing outside the system, watching and analyzing the numbers from a safe distance. There is no safe distance.

[00:10:39] There never was. The smoke, probably likely coming in months from a forest on the far side of British Columbia, ends up in the kids around here lungs as one of countless examples. The line we drew around ourselves was always imaginary, and our culture supported and advocated it, and the planet is now spending a great deal of energy reminding us of that line.

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[00:11:09] And if that's all true

[00:11:14] my reason for recording this, at the last minute. If that's all true, then the concept of non-duality stops being some spiritual luxury for people with time and money on their hands. It starts looking like the missing piece. The thing pointing straight at the root of how we came to treat everything we depend on as, as though, it was on a balance sheet and it was not us.

[00:11:48] As we keep looking for fixes out there in our policies and in technology and in guidance from AI and better numbers to analyze a thing. But maybe, dare I say probably, some of the real work is in here, in our own quiet dismantling of that wall that allowed us en masse, eight billion strong, though not all of eight billion, there are indigenous people that have understood this all along.

[00:12:24] Allowed us en masse to treat a living world like a dead one in the first place. So sitting here today, I still cannot define non-duality for you. I've had many chances, and have seemingly failed. But I'm starting to suspect that my hunger and my drive to nail down the definition to get that clean sentence or paragraph and to file it away as something I understand, is perhaps the most Western thing about me.

[00:13:05] The grasping itself is the wall so I will leave it where it actually sits for me today, which is unfinished. Maybe the gift here was never going to be that I finally understood non-duality. maybe it's smaller and more honest, and a bit more potent than that. It's just that my grip has loosened a little, and the certainty that I'm in here and everything else is out there gets a hairline crack in it, and then a bit more light gets through than it did yesterday.

[00:13:52] I have not learned it, the term or the practice, but I have definitely learned to stop being so sure that I'm separate

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[00:14:06] Talk to you next week. Have a good weekend