

Rupert Spira - BATGAP Interview # 95

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{BATGAP theme music plays}

**Rick:** Welcome to Buddha at the Gas Pump. My name is Rick Archer and my guest this week is Rupert Spira. And I had the pleasure of meeting Rupert and his lovely wife and his brother Andrew out at the Science & Nonduality Conference in California, a couple of weeks ago. Thanks again to generous donors that made that possible for me.

I'm really pleased to be speaking with Rupert ... I very much enjoyed your presentation at the Conference and I'm really enjoying reading your book, *The Transparency of Things*. I understand you also have a more recent book, but what I like about your book is that as I read it, I'm actually reading each little section – each section consists of very short paragraphs, usually one or two sentences, and I find I tend to read each one 2 or 3 times and kind of settle down with each reading, and it's almost like a mediation practice or a mantra, or something. I settle down with each reading until it is sort of settled into the heart and has become clear to me, then I go on to the next one. So after 15 minutes of reading I feel that it has shifted my awareness somewhat, which I imagine was your intention in writing the book.

**Rupert:** Exactly, that's exactly how I hoped it would be read. It is not a book for reading cover to cover, as you say, it was written with almost one sentence to a paragraph. It is a very contemplative process of reading and I hoped that people would read it exactly as you are reading it – one or two sentences, long pause, allow it – as you say – to go into the heart.

**Rick:** Yeah, and I am reading it cover to cover but I'm taking my time you know, sometimes just 10 or 15 minutes of reading and then I go to sleep for the night, but it's very enjoyable. And it raises a lot of interesting questions, but it's been very enjoyable to read.

So why don't we start by having you tell us just a little bit about yourself and your background and all, because some people might not be familiar with you at all. I know that by profession you are a ceramic artist, but why don't you fill in that information a bit before we continue.

**Rupert:** Well I was a ceramic artist until I started speaking fulltime about Nonduality, and now there's not enough hours in the day to do both. So in fact now, over the last year or so, I've almost completely stopped making bowls and am speaking or traveling pretty much fulltime now.

**Rick:** Oh, I envy you; maybe I'll evolve in that direction. I'd much rather be doing this fulltime than what I do. 😊 Okay, so you were a ceramic artist and I understand that Francis Lucille was your teacher, but that unlike me who was kind of a wild kid back in the 60s, taking full advantage of everything the 60s had to offer, you spent your teenage years and thereafter probing into this stuff ... reading and thinking and meditating and whatnot.

**Rupert:** Yes, from about my mid-teens onward the nature of reality - for want of a better phrase – was really ... not my only interest but my main focus of my interest. And I started going to a school of classic Advaita-Vedanta in London, where I spent much of the next 20 years. I learned to meditate there and I ...

**Rick:** It was a formal school or just meetings?

**Rupert:** No, it was a formal school that had originally been started by the Russian philosopher P.D. Ouspensky but had subsequently moved on and was now under the guidance of the then Shankaracharya of the North of India. So I spent 20 years really studying and practicing the classical Advaita-Vedanta teachings and at the same time I also learned the Mevlevi turning – the whirling dervishes ... the Sufi practice ... and I learned Gurdjeff's movements.

But my main focus all this time was the Advaita teaching as it was taught in a classical Indian format through the Shankaracharya. And I spend 20 years or so there; it was the main focus of my interest during all those years, roughly from the age of 15 to 35.

**Rick:** Mm, so you had a meditation practice of some sort there?

**Rupert:** I meditated twice a day ... mantra meditation, I went to study groups; it was really the main focus of my life, quite intensely, for those 20 or so years, before I met my teacher Francis Lucille.

**Rick:** I was a student of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for many years and his master was the previous Shankaracharya of the North – Ramanand Saraswati.

**Rupert:** Oh yeah, that's interesting ... Shantanand Saraswati was my teacher in India for those 20 years, and he and the Maharishi shared a teacher – Guru Deva, so it was a very similar tradition, it came from the same source.

**Rick:** Oh, interesting, so we're cousins. 😊

**Rupert:** Exactly, yes. And just to elaborate on that, that really prepared the ground; it was like 20 years of preparation.

**Rick:** I'm glad to hear you say that because a lot of people do something like that and then after 20 or 30 years they have an awakening, then they turn around and say to everybody, "Oh, you don't need to do anything," even though they've been doing it for 30 years.

**Rupert:** Yes, that was a preparation for me, for what happened next, which was meeting with Francis, who I immediately recognized as my teacher and friend. And in fact, that meeting, in a way, made sense of my past because I had gotten to a stage at the school of Advaita-Vedanta where I felt that I couldn't go any further. I knew that there was something still missing; I hadn't really managed to make the teaching my own. I loved it deeply and it was the focus of my interest and love and attention, but there was something that was still missing and I knew this, so it prepared me then for meeting Francis.

**Rick:** And that's when you were 35, how old are you now?

**Rupert:** 36 actually ... and I'm now 51.

**Rick:** Okay. Was Francis in France at the time or was he in California?

**Rupert:** I actually met him for the first time in my home – in the West Midlands, but he was living in Northern California. And during the subsequent years I spent a lot of time with him in Northern California, before he moved south, where he is now.

**Rick:** Okay, and what was it about Francis that made you realize that he was your teacher? Was it sort of an intuitive thing, more than anything he said?

**Rupert:** Yes. I couldn't put it down to any one thing that he did or said, it was just in our very first meeting ... a simple, unmistakable knowing that this is what I've been prepared for and this is what I've been looking for.

**Rick:** An affinity.

**Rupert:** Yes, but it wasn't about a person, although I had a close friendship with Francis, but it wasn't about a person. It was something much deeper than that; it was like a recognition ... like an "Ah ..." The way I formulated it to myself at the time is ... "Ah, I've come home." Don't ask me exactly what I meant by that because home wasn't a place or a person, it wasn't even a teaching. Somehow there was just this unmistakable recognition - "Oh, that's it, I'm home."

**Rick:** Yeah, I know what you mean. And as you begin studying with Francis or whatever the word may be, what was the nature of it? Was it basically a Satsang arrangement where Francis would talk and you would listen, or what?

**Rupert:** The teaching takes place on many different levels. The top layer, we could say, is teaching, formal teaching – questions and answers ... the teacher giving the discourse or answering questions. So that's in a way one layer of the teaching, but there was also a deeper layer, a more contemplative exploration of my experience, which to begin with he guided me in, and later on I would find my own ways.

Inspired by the ways that he had shared with me, I would find my own ways of exploring my own experiences. So this was like a deeper layer of the teaching – more contemplative ... less verbal and more contemplative. In particular involving not just the exploration of the beliefs in separation, but more importantly the *feelings* of separation in the body. And that was an exploration that really is not undertaken at the level of words or conversations.

This was something that had been missing in my previous teaching and I realized it had been missing, so the first few years I spent with him, he really opened the door to this much deeper level of investigation - at the level of the body.

And then the third aspect of the teaching was really just being together. Sometimes just being together. Sometimes just being together in silence, as we did often, or sometimes just going shopping together, or

cooking, or having casual conversation. So I elaborate on that because I want to make it clear that the teaching in words, the questions and answers ... it would be simplistic to reduce - and I'm not suggesting for a minute that you are - but to reduce the Advaita teaching to a kind of exchange of information or even a conversation; right from the beginning it was very much more than that.

**Rick:** Yeah, I would agree, it's a multilayered thing, and the words are just the tip of the iceberg and there's so much more going on.

**Rupert:** Exactly, exactly. There's an energetic thing going on but even more, even below the energetic thing there is a kind of sharing of presence or silence, which is even deeper than the energetic exchange, let alone the verbal exchange.

**Rick:** Yeah, yeah. I would say perhaps that there is a kind of attunement that takes place when you can be in the proximity of a teacher like that ...

**Rupert:** Yes, it's a kind of resonance.

**Rick:** Yeah, it's like the, you know, you get a piece of iron near a magnet and it eventually becomes a magnet itself. You could use various allegories ... or you know, like a piece of wood near a burning piece; the second piece ignites after a while just because of the ... yeah.

This exploration of feelings in the body, was it a deliberate *practice* where like you sit in a meditative way and sort of explore what's going on, or was it sort of something you did 24 hours a day, when you were awake, or both?

**Rupert:** Both, in a way, but I wouldn't say that it was - even in its more formal aspect - I would never say that it was a practice. It wasn't like, "Here are a set of things that you can do and now you go away and practice them on your cushion," it was never like that. The explorations were always made-up in the moment; they were just spontaneous ways of exploring the feeling of being located in and as a body. So to call them a practice would somehow suggest some kind of mechanical element that you as a separate entity can undertake in order to achieve some kind of an outcome. It wasn't like that at all; they were very sensitive and loving contemplations of the body, and in particular of the sense of 'I am this limited, located self.'

So it started out as this - in a slightly formal way - these loving explorations or contemplations of the body, but then these just extended into everyday life. So in the end, the difference between when I was exploring this with my teacher and when I was just out in everyday life exploring it, that difference fairly quickly faded away.

And I would just find myself walking down the street whenever there was spare attention or I wasn't focused on any particular task, this loving contemplation or exploration of the body - and not just of the body but of the world ... of my perceptions - would just take place. So it was just the air I breathed. It was what I loved doing and what I was interested in, and it just took place naturally, at all different times of the day and the night.

**Rick:** So it became second nature after a while.

**Rupert:** It was second nature, yes. And all the years that I was in the classical Advaita School, this exploration of truth or reality or whatever we want to call it ... or of one's self, it was second nature anyway, it was what I was doing pretty well 24-7 anyway, but this took that exploration out of my mind. In other words, it took it out of my thoughts and it brought it down into my sensations, into my body, and not just into my body, but *out* into my perceptions of the world. So it was an exploration that included the sense of separation in the body and the feeling of the world being outside, separate, distant, and other.

**Rick:** Mm, was that Francis's specific recommendation that you do that, or did it just somehow arise because of your ...

**Rupert:** No, no, no, he had no recommendations. He had no prescriptions, no recommendations, no agendas; he would just respond to conversations and questions, and if I asked a question about something then he would respond to the question, but there were no recommendations per se, it was just part of the deepening exploration of my experience that he led me into.

**Rick:** Can you give us a specific example of ... hopefully this won't be too crass ... to try to narrow it down to a specific example. But if you could think back to when you were doing this, and maybe you still *are* doing it a little bit, but let's say you're walking down the street for instance, try to put inside the mechanics of this experience or this process that you've been referring to, in a way that people listening could relate to and perhaps even begin to do themselves.

**Rupert:** Let's take an example ... well actually, I'll give you a real-life example, in fact, it was almost the very first time this happened for me. I was sitting with Francis in his home in Northern California then, and we were having a conversation about Nonduality and I don't remember exactly what it was. And I remember at the time hearing a dog barking, and it was a distant sound of a dog, and *immediately* a thought came up: that's the sound of a dog barking and the dog is in the distance, on the other side of the valley.

So somehow this was relevant to the context of the conversation and I said to him, "But it's *so* obvious to me that that dog is on the other side of the valley. It's so obvious that the sound is taking place ... it's at a distance from myself and it's made out of something other than myself; it's a dog barking, it's not me.

And I remember at the time, I must have been sitting on the floor, he said, "Place your hands on the carpet." So I just went like this ... actually, I shut my eyes, I remember. And he said, "Place your hands on the carpet." And I placed my hands on the carpet and he just said, "Where does that sensation take place?" And it was just *so* obvious at that moment that the sensation took place inside me, that the sensation was not at a distance from me, it wasn't made of something other than myself; all that was present was the experience of sensing. And sensing takes place in me, not in me "a body and a mind," but in this open, empty, aware presence. And if I look *inside* that experience of sensing and find out what is there, what is it made of ... awareness is the only substance present there for it to be made of. It

just became so clear, experientially; it was experiential before it was rationalized. It was just so obvious that this sensation was taking place *inside* of me, so to speak, and not only inside me, but [it was] made out of my self.

So that was the end of it, that was the end of the conversation but it was like a key. Suddenly I reasoned with myself, "If this is true, that what I thought was this carpet – this dead, inert material called 'the carpet,' it must be true of everything." So then wherever I went ... I'd go out on the streets and I'd be looking at cars and people and houses and I realized, all I know of these so-called cars and people and houses is the experience of seeing and hearing.

**Where does seeing take place?** Does it take place 10 meters away from myself, or 2 meters, or 20 meters? When I look at the moon, all I know of the moon is the experience of seeing. Does it take place at a million miles from myself or is it intimate, close, made only out of myself? It just became so obvious that wherever I looked, wherever I turned, all I knew was the experience of experiencing. That was all I ever knew ... experiencing, and all experience is pervaded by the knowing of it, and I am *that* knowingness, that awareness. It pervades all experience, intimately.

So it just became clear to me at a very experiential level, long before I was able to rationalize it in the way I'm doing now, that all that is ever known is experience and I, the knowing-element in all experience, pervade all experience intimately. In fact, even that is not true because I'm suggesting that there are two things: one called 'experience' and another called 'myself,' and that they somehow pervade each other; it's not even that. All there is, all we know is the knowing of our experience, and that is what "I" am, that is what I-awareness is ... this pure knowingness, which is the substance of all experience.

**Rick:** Now someone might argue, "Well, that doesn't mean that the dog is within yourself or anything, or that you and the dog are the same thing. The dog is 2 miles away and your awareness, which is created by your brain ☺ and is functioning through the sense of hearing ... and just sound vibrations are coming and fluctuations in air pressure are hitting your eardrum and so on, and that's giving the experience of a dog. And if you were deaf you wouldn't hear the dog, but somebody else in the room might hear the dog, so it's not within you; it's just ..." And I'm just kind of alluding to the way people ordinarily experience and understand the world, you know?

**Rupert:** Yes. So what you're starting with is a conventional model: that first of all there is time and space, the world appears in time and space, a body is born in the world, a mind appears inside the body, and eventually a little, fragile spark of consciousness or awareness appears within the mind and created, as you say, by the brain. That's the conventional model and the objection that you raised is based on that model.

However there is absolutely no evidence of that model at all, because what you're starting with is the *absolute* reality of time and space in the world and saying that "I" - this little, fragile awareness - appears at some point inside this world, inside this body, but it's just simply not our experience. Our experience was that awareness was there first ... when I say "was there first," I'm making a concession when I say that, to the belief in the reality of time. What I really mean is "awareness is *here, now*," but in order to

translate it and to respond to your question, let's just say awareness was there first – that is the primal experience.

So we have a *belief* that time and space were here first, then the body, then the mind, and eventually awareness was created by the brain, but it's never been experienced. The experience is always that awareness was there first, that the world appears *in* awareness, that the body appears *in* awareness, our thoughts appear *in* awareness, and the only substance present in awareness, out of which they can be made, is awareness itself.

We can dance around this question for as long as we like but in the end, if we're going to use experience as the measure of truth, we have to acknowledge that awareness is here first, before the world. Not before "in time," but prior to the experience ...

**Rick:** Right ... fundamentally.

**Rupert:** Exactly.

**Rick:** Well I would do a pretty poor job trying to continue to play devil's advocate for the materialist position because I don't share it ☺. In fact, you know, I agree with you sort of intuitively and experientially, but it's interesting to play with it.

How about this one...? Let's say out at the Conference, there were maybe 500 people in the room when you spoke and we all – presuming our eyesight was functioning normally – saw someone that we could describe as "Rupert Spira;" we didn't see a pink elephant on the stage, or a pine tree, or something like that. There was a sort of a [shared] commonality in our mutual experience. So that sort of points to the idea that there's a sort of an objectivity to reality that is independent of individual observers. Do you know what I'm getting at?

**Rupert:** I do.

**Rick:** And how do you respond to that point?

**Rupert:** I would agree there is a commonality to experience but it's not the outside world; it's awareness that share, not the outside world. But because the mind has no knowledge of awareness – it can't see it, it can't know it, the mind ... and I'm caricaturing the mind here – the mind says "Yes," as it were, that "there is a continuity to my experience, what can this continuity be a result of?" So it looks around for something to explain the apparent continuity of experience and the only place the mind can look is to objects.

Well the mind is obviously not continuous, the body is - in the mind's view - fairly continuous, and the world is obviously the continuous element, as far as the mind is concerned. So the mind conceives of this permanent world, permanent time and space, but it's only because the mind cannot know or cannot see awareness. In fact, the world is not shared in our experience; everyone's experience of the world is private.

**Rick:** It's private but there's a commonality.

**Rupert:** There's a commonality, so what is common in our experience of the world? It is awareness.

**Rick:** Yeah, that we all have awareness.

**Rupert:** It is the only thing we share but because the mind cannot see awareness, it overlooks the presence of awareness and it attributes the apparent commonality or continuity to the world; so it's just because the mind knows nothing of awareness. What is truly shared, what is truly continuous in our experience is not a world or a body or a mind, it's awareness.

**Rick:** No, I agree with that and awareness is sort of the ultimate common denominator among us all, but what I was getting at is that in addition to that commonality, there seems to be a sort of agreed-upon objective reality. We don't all completely fabricate a different world, if we did, it wouldn't be possible for us to function as human beings or as a society, or anything. There seems to be an objective structure that is agreed-upon, unless we're psychotic or hallucinatory or something ... you know?

**Rupert:** Okay, okay, so consider this Rick: imagine you had a dream and you invite 12 people for dinner. They all sit round the table and in the middle of the table there is a vase of flowers. Each person that you've invited for dinner describes the vase of flowers. The descriptions are all slightly different because they're all looking from a different point of view ...

**Rick:** In a dream? This is in a dream?

**Rupert:** In a dream, but everyone's description is similar enough to make everyone in the dream feel that they're perceiving the same vase of flowers. Now, you wake up. What is it that accounts for the similarity of everyone's description?

**Rick:** Your own dream.

**Rupert:** Yes, because it was only one mind that was having the dream, yes? Now, what about if exactly the same thing is true in the waking state? Twelve people are sitting around a table, or in this case 500 people in a room, everyone describes not an identical but a similar picture, and this is enough to convince everyone that there is a *real*, independently existing, outside world, which each of them is getting a slightly different view of.

Could it not be that what is common, what gives everyone the sense that there is a commonality to their experience is because just like the dream, there is one thing in common: each of the 12 people staying for dinner, they're all born out of the same mind? What about if these 500 views of Rupert sitting on the stage are all born out of the same consciousness? All born out of the same awareness? And it's precisely because they come from and therefore express the same awareness that there is a commonality of view.

When the mind then tries to account for that commonality, because it can't see awareness it attributes permanence, commonality, to the object, but it's a misplaced ... it's projecting the only true ... that the

reality of our experience ... it's projecting it onto an object only because the mind cannot see the *true* reality of our experience, which is awareness.

**Rick:** So you're saying that not only is awareness a common substratum for us all but that in a more manifest way, there is sort of a universal Mind which gives rise to an agreed-upon environment? And I'm not suggesting that the environment is non-changing; of course it is always changing, but there is sort of agreed-upon structure to it. You know, we all see the red light and we stop our cars, it's not subject to interpretation unless there's something wrong with our perceptual apparatus.

**Rupert:** But you're having a dream and everyone arrives at the traffic light, everyone stops at the red light – that doesn't tell us anything about the nature of the mind in which the dream is taking place. So if we look to objective phenomena to try and ascertain something about awareness, we're never going to find out about awareness. There's only one place to find out about awareness and that is in awareness itself.

**Rick:** Yeah, and I'm not saying that, I'm not suggesting that we look to objective phenomena to find out about awareness; I'm just saying that the universality extends beyond the unmanifest. It seems there's a universality to the relative itself, which enables us all to live in an agreed-upon apparent reality that doesn't fluctuate according to the vagaries of individuality.

**Rupert:** Sure ... at the relative level that's certainly true.

**Rick:** I find that interesting. It sort of implies an intelligence that structures the world that is far vaster than our individual expressions of intelligence.

**Rupert:** Sure, yes.

**Rick:** Maybe it's an irrelevant point to you, I don't know, but for some reason I just felt to pursue it.

**Rupert:** You know, I'll tell you why I don't ...

**Rick:** ... get intrigued with that?

**Rupert:** I don't get intrigued because they're interesting ideas Rick, to play around with, and to try to make models of reality that account for an inter-subjective agreement but you know, at very best, at *best*, these arguments are going to be convincing intellectually, and that's at best. In most cases they are not convincing intellectually; there's always a loophole.

And you know, I don't want to discuss ideas with you, Rick.

**Rick:** Sure.

**Rupert:** Let's talk about experience. Something ... I don't want to theorize because you know, to be honest, I don't have any hard and fast theories about the way the physical world is. The answer is: I don't really know why the physical world is where it is. I don't really know and I'm not really ... in a way I'm not really interested. I don't really think that a human mind, if we can call it a human mind, can

every truly understand the laws that govern the universe; at *best* it would be intellectual speculation. And I'm not putting that down, there's nothing wrong with it, but it's not what I'm interested in.

**Rick:** Yeah, you don't feel it's germane to realization. I think the reason I brought it up was just that there was a *sense* in what you were saying that each of us creates the world through our own subjectivity, and that sort of made me feel like ... well yeah, but there seems to be something that is not dependent on our subjectivity that maintains a structure to the world.

**Rupert:** And I hope I didn't imply Rick that each of us creates the world; all I know of the world is perception, that's all I know of the world – sights, sounds, tastes, textures, and smells, that's it. Now these, in my experience, they just appear in myself. When I say in "myself" here, I refer to this aware presence that I know myself to be.

These sights and sounds, they just appear in this presence – they're never separate from it, never at a distance from it. And when I explore my experience to see for myself what these sights and sounds and tastes and textures and smells are made out of, the only substance I find present in my experience is the *knowing* of them. In other words, it is this knowingness or awareness that is the substance, the reality of my experience. That doesn't mean that experience doesn't appear as a car, a house, a tree, a moon, a person; of course all those appearances ... they continue. But when I explore what is the reality, what are these appearances *really* made of, all I find is the intimacy of my own being. That's all I can say.

So I don't want to speculate about an apparently objective world because I've never experienced objective world. All I've experienced is a perception appearing in awareness, in fact, even *that* model is not quite right because I'm suggesting that awareness is like a big, open, empty space and a perception appears in it, it's not like that. It's more like a screen – of course this metaphor is not even right – but it's more like a screen. It's not that the perception appears *on* the screen, it *is* the screen! The screen is the only thing there.

When you go up and touch the landscape – the trees and the flowers and the hills and the fields, you don't touch trees and flowers and hills and fields, you never find them; you just find the screen. It is the same thing in my experience. Yes, of course, my experience seems to comprise a computer, a camera, a lamp, a room, etcetera, but when I go intimately, lovingly, to the heart of that experience, first of all what I find is seeing, hearing, touching. And then when I ask - again, in my experience, not intellectually - but when I ask, "What is seeing made of? What is its reality? What is its substance?" When I go up to it and touch it, all I find there is the knowing of it.

And when I say, "All I find there," who is the one that finds that? That one is aware or knowing, so it is knowing that finds itself, it is awareness that is aware of itself, that's all my experience consists of: awareness knowing itself, being itself, in all this apparent multiplicity and diversity of experience. But it is only a multiplicity and diversity of experience *from* the point of view of one of the apparently diverse objects, in other words, from the point of view of a separate self.

From awareness's point of view it's not a multiplicity and diversity of everything; it is just itself, everywhere. Wherever it looks all it finds, all it knows, all it loves is itself – the self, our self, this very self present now, that is seeing and hearing.

**Rick:** Beautiful. In your own experience, since you like to refer to your own experience - I think that's wise - presumably you started out many years ago like all of us perceiving things from the perspective of the isolated individual. And now, apparently, things have shifted to the perspective of awareness. Is that a predominant perspective or is it exclusive? I mean, is there still balance between universal perspective - seeing everything as [being] in awareness - and having the individual perspective along with it, and is there a ratio that tends to go back and forth like a seesaw, or is that an absurd way to speak? I mean, is it all just the other pole of the spectrum now?

**Rupert:** No, that's not absurd way to speak at all. I would say that occasionally old habits of thinking and feeling, and as result acting and relating on behalf of a separate inside self, continue to appear. These are old habits that still have a little bit of juice left in them and that are occasionally triggered, apparently, by a situation or an event, so I would never say never. These are the old habits of thinking and believing on behalf of a separate self; we never know when they're going to pop up again and they continue to pop up from time to time.

**Rick:** And isn't a certain bit of separate self necessary? Maharishi used the term 'Lesha-vidya' - faint remains of ignorance, and he used to say, "You need a bit of that in order to actually function as a human being." The Vedantic analogy he uses was that if you take a butterball and you're holding it in your hand and then you throw it off, there's still a sort of greasy surface on your palm, and that without some remnant, at least, of a sense of individuality, you wouldn't be able to function in the world. Do you agree with that?

**Rupert:** That's not my experience, in fact, it's the presence of the imaginary separate self that causes dysfunctional behavior in relationships in the world. The belief and feeling of separation serves absolutely no practical purposes at all. It has one function in life and that it to create unhappiness – that's all it does for us. I

it is possible to lead a perfectly sane, ordinary, healthy, active, engaged life, with a family, at work, you know, just a regular life, without any sense of being a separate self, and indeed, without ever mentioning or speaking of Nonduality.

**Rick:** Mm-hm. That point always puzzles me because, you know, having had my own spiritual practice for decades I am very comfortable and settled in a state of presence and so on, but I still experience a sense of separate self in *addition* to that which is not a separate self. The two somehow go hand in hand and they get along very comfortably together.

I mean, if I were to say to you, "Rupert, run down to the bank and take out all your money and send it to me," or if the police were to call and say, "Mr. Spira, your son has been hit by a car," seems to me that there would naturally be a sort of individual reaction to things like that.

**Rupert:** Yes, but you see ... of course there would, in both those occasions, in both those situations. But you're equating individuality with ignorance, you're equating individuality with the belief and feeling of separation. I wouldn't define it in that way.

When the body-mind is relieved of the belief and feeling of separation, in other words, when the imaginary self ceases to live in here (pointing to his head) – the thinker, the feeler, the chooser, the decider, or in here (pointing to his heart) – the feeler, the lover ... - the body-mind is then liberated of a tremendous burden and as a result, that body-mind then flourishes. It doesn't necessarily become a white-washed wall without any character or without any individuality, on the contrary, it's the belief in separation that crushes true individuality.

Real individuality flourishes in the absence of a sense of separation. The true character, the individuality ... it flowers, it blossoms when it is relieved of the cramp of being a separate, limited self. And how that individuality expresses itself varies hugely from body-mind to body-mind. In one, there may be an explosion of creativity and extroversion and going out into the world in one form or another, in another, it may just go home quietly and live on their own, or maybe have a family, or work in the community, or whatever. These two extremes plus everything in-between are possible.

So that's what I would call individuality: in-dividual, un-divided, an expression of the undivided whole at the level of the body-mind. And that kind of individuality, that kind of uniqueness is not an expression of the separate self; on the contrary, it flourishes when the separate self is seen to be nonexistent.

**Rick:** Interesting. So to just dwell on this a little bit more if you don't mind, I had a ... I mean, I'm not the big, flashy experience kind of guy; I've had many little breakthroughs and a few big ones. There was one particular big one back in the 80s where ... it actually happened during sleep and I woke up feeling like I'd been released from a straightjacket that I'd been in all my life, and there was complete freedom and independence of a sense of separate self, as you say, although there was still an individual body-mind which got up and went about its day.

And I don't think I've ever returned to that sort of constraint since then, that I once lived in, but I still have a sense of personhood, you know? I mean if somebody, obviously, if somebody comes into the room and says, "Hey Rick," I'd turn my head, or if my wife says, "Take out the garbage," I know who she's talking to.

**Rupert:** Sure, me too.

**Rick:** So sometimes when you hear about oneness you kind of get the sense of an amorphous ocean of sameness, you know? But the ocean is the ocean and it has many, many waves, but it's still one ocean, and yet each wave has its distinct expression. So I suppose what you're saying is: one no longer considers oneself to be merely the wave; one realizes one is the ocean but expressing as a particular wave, which is nonetheless one with the ocean. Would that be a fair way of putting it or am I getting too wordy here?

**Rupert:** Yes ... no, you could put it like that. You see ... sorry, just to elaborate on that.

**Rick:** Go ahead, yes please.

**Rupert:** Rick ... all these examples that you give: turning your head when your wife calls your name, these kinds of things, there are just practical responses of a body-mind, of a character to a situation.

There's no ignorance – and when I say 'ignorance' I don't mean it critically; I just mean it in the sense of ignoring the reality of our experience – these kinds of responses are not a sign that the separate self is still in place.

I think what happened for many people that had to go to India for enlightenment, because these people – and I started for 20 years going to India and that was a *tremendous* disadvantage to me in some ways, because I never really *saw* Nonduality for *real*, in everyday experience; it was always packaged in the rather exotic culture of India. I could never really see, live alongside, see how - in my case the Shankaracharya - related, you know ... what did he talk about when he had his meals, how he treated his kids, all this kind of thing.

[To me] he was just a flowing white beard and an orange robe and no disrespect at all ... he was part of his culture. Or Ramana Maharishi was another model ... I modeled myself under Ramana Maharishi for 20 years and failed *spectacularly*, because all I knew of him was this beautiful, smiling, almost silent being. And I thought, "Okay, if you want to be self-realized you *have* to be like that," and of course ... because the only time I ever saw him was in my imagination or in one or two photographs. I never *lived* 24-7 and really saw what it was like, this understanding, in real life. And even if I had been with him in India, he was conditioned at one level by his Indian upbringing.

So for this reason, I think many people who went primarily or solely to India for enlightenment still have some residue of a notion that somehow awakening, or enlightenment - I don't like using these words because they're so laden with exotic experiences – but somehow this ... it can wipe the character clean and you can no longer ... you can barely function.

I mean, I was at a meeting recently and somebody even suggested that when I put on a sweater in the cold weather, it was somehow a resistance to the current situation, and that therefore was a sign that I was a separate self. And I asked him, "Well what about when I eat? You could say that was a resistance to the feeling of hunger and therefore an expression of ignorance." And he said, "Well yes, I do think that."

So these crazy notions and these kinds of ideas make enlightenment something *impossible* to ever realize, something that you have to be superhuman ... "How could I with all my faults, all my character, how could I ever realize what these people are talking about, because you have to be this bland, whitewashed, perfect creature?" And this just projects enlightenment further, and further, and further away in the distance, when actually the teaching should make it seem closer and closer and closer, and easier and easier and easier, because real enlightenment is not an exotic experience; it is the natural condition of all experience, it is the most familiar thing we know. Just the knowing of our own being as it is, and it shines at the heart of all experience, it's *always* present, it's the best known thing – if we can call it a "thing" – that we know.

**Rick:** It's a great point and I'm glad you said it. I think that a lot of people need to hear that. In my own town, where I live, there are thousands of people who have been meditating for *decades*, there's a university here where John Hagelin is from and so on - John Hagelin is a fellow who spoke at the Conference we both attended – and you know, there's definitely this notion that enlightenment is something that is off the charts special and even flashy.

Even Maharishi himself had a charismatic personality and a certain way of speaking, and a lot of presence and darshan and all, and people think, "Well *that's* enlightenment. Me? I'm just a chump. How could I possibly ..."

**Rupert:** I think these – and I'm not referring to the characters you mentioned in any way, but these kinds of ideas that enlightenment is somehow exotic and far away ... it's *India* that's exotic and far away, it's not enlightenment. Enlightenment and India have *nothing* to do with each other. India is truly exotic but enlightenment is not exotic.

The knowing of our own being, the knowing of the light which truly illumines all experience is the most familiar, the most natural, the most easily recognizable thing in our experience. And by allying enlightenment to an exotic culture or to an exotic experience, it puts it at a distance. **And by putting enlightenment at a distance, over there, you just crystallize the sense of a separate self in here, that then has to meditate and work hard for 30 years.**

So these kinds of beliefs, they just perpetuate the separate self, and the separate self, the more it tries to achieve enlightenment, the more it strengthens itself. In fact, one of the best ways the separate self perpetuates itself is by trying to get rid of itself, trying to attain enlightenment. And this is why people complain ... I hear this so often in my meetings: "I've been doing this for 30 years and I've been trying."

And that's very, very genuine, and I myself did this for 20 years, **but I didn't notice that *subtly*, the separate self was perpetuating itself, trying to get rid of itself in favor of an exotic experience that was projected *way* out there in the future,** and if possible, [with] an Indian or Tibetan label attached to it.

**Rick:** Yeah, I seem to recall that the Nazis complained that Relativity Theory was Jewish and then of course it might be argued that gravity is British, since Sir Isaac Newton came to understand it. So I totally agree with you, enlightenment is not an Indian thing ... **I wouldn't even say it's a *human* thing.**

**Rupert:** Of course not!

**Rick:** **I mean who knows, there may be species on other planets who are enjoying enlightenment, who are not human.**

**Rupert:** Enlightenment is not something that the human species or any other species enjoys; enlightenment is awareness recognizing itself. Of course ultimately, awareness never ceases to recognize or know itself, so even that's not quite true, but **the only one that enjoys enlightenment is awareness; it's not a human achievement, it's not an alien achievement, it's not an animal achievement. Awareness is the only One that is aware of anything, and enlightenment is just being *relieved* of the apparent veil which says that enlightenment is not present, that light is not present.**

**Rick:** Mm-hm. This is interesting. I sent you an email just about half an hour before we started and I don't know if you had a chance to look at it, but it was sent to me by someone who knew I was going to interview you. And it's a *long* thing – it's about a page long - but the distillation of his question is ...

**Rupert:** I didn't see it Rick.

**Rick:** He wanted me to ask you and it pertains to what you're saying - and maybe this is a metaphysical speculation and you don't want to go there – but he wanted to ask if it seems there's **anything gained by the whole rigmarole of creation having had to somehow manifest and come about, and life forms evolving who could eventually realize - through the instrumentality of our human nervous system – that from which they came ...** to quote that T.S. Elliot quote: "We shall not cease from exploration in the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

So his question was, "Is there anything that is somehow *more* than what was there to begin with before the whole creation manifested?" Is that too metaphysical for you ...?

**Rupert:** No, it's not, but it depends ... **from whose point of view are we going to consider this from? From the point of view of awareness - if we can consider awareness having a point of view - or from the point of view of the separate self?** From the point of view of the separate self, yes, there is meaning, there is a purpose, there is a destiny, there is something to be discovered, there is something to be achieved. So yes, all that, from the point of view of the separate self, there is a purpose to evolution. But from the point of view of *awareness*, which is the *real* point of view, it is already everything it could ever be. **There is no "becoming," there's nothing for it to find or know. Wherever it looks all it finds is more of itself. So no, from the point of view of awareness there is no purpose,** there's no destiny, there's no meaning; it is already that for which all apparent selves are destined.

So there is only a purpose or a meaning for a separate self, **but the separate self is only a real self from the illusory point of view of that separate self.** In other words, imagine a film ... there's a character in a film and there are lots of people in the film. **All the people are real from the point of view of the main character. Everything in the film that appears is real in relation to the point of view of the main character. But that character *itself* doesn't have a real point of view; it's *in* the view, it's only made of the screen.**

**The separate self is not a real character with a real point of view; it's just an object, appearing in the view. In other words, the entire adventure of forgetting our true nature and then remembering or realizing our true nature, the whole thing takes place in a little bubble. And that little bubble is like a tiny little thought and feeling bubble taking place in awareness. It seems very important for the one that is inside that bubble, but the one that is inside that bubble is only a real someone from the illusory point of view of that one inside the bubble. But for awareness, which is the only one that really knows or is aware, it's not going anywhere, it's not becoming anything; it is already that for which all seeming things are destined.**

**Rick:** Agreed, now, but when you say, “Awareness becomes aware of itself, or “Everywhere it looks it sees itself,” that sort of statement implies some mechanism of knowing or seeing, as if awareness had little senses and ...

**Rupert:** Okay, okay ... but you must allow me the limitations of language. Awareness doesn't go around looking and seeing itself everywhere, this is just the limitations of language. I didn't mean to suggest what you are now implying, that somehow awareness goes out looking for itself and seeing itself everywhere; I'm just using language casually and caricaturing awareness. But of course, awareness doesn't go around looking for itself or seeing itself everywhere; it is already knowing itself, it never ceases to know itself or be itself.

It's only a thought, or a thought and a feeling, that rises up in awareness and made only of awareness, that *seems* to make it ... that makes it seem as if awareness is not knowing itself. Like an image that rises up on a screen that makes it seem that the screen is veiled and what we are seeing is a landscape. We think, “I'm no longer seeing the screen, I'm seeing the landscape” - it's like that. But in fact, when we're seeing the landscape, we're never really seeing the landscape, we're always, always, always only seeing the screen.

Likewise, from awareness's point of view, which is the only real point of view, it is always, always, always only knowing itself. But a thought arises, made only of awareness, which seems to veil awareness like this image seems to veil the screen, and from the point of view of this thought it seems that awareness is veiled. And this thought may itself now have to go out and do lots of things in order to find awareness again, but awareness is ... it's like the common metaphor of a wave seeking water, that is what the separate self is doing; it is made out of the very stuff for which it is in search.

So there's no true veiling of awareness. Just as even the darkest horror movie never truly veils your T.V. screen, so the darkest mood or depression or thought never truly veil awareness. Awareness is only veiled from the point of view of the imaginary entity, which is *itself* made out of the very stuff - that awareness - which it *apparently* veils. In other words, there is no real ignorance.

That's why in India they don't have a word for ignorance; they refer to the *illusion* of ignorance. If there was such a thing as ignorance then we would have a problem on our hands, we would have to sit on our cushion for 30 years to get rid of it. But ignorance is only ignorance from the point of view of ignorance; it's not real. From awareness's point of view, which is the only point of view, there is no ignorance!

What can we do about nonexistent ignorance? What is there to be done about it? Just to see that it is nonexistent.

**Rick:** Right, the rope was never a snake.

**Rupert:** The rope was never a snake.

**Rick:** And the word 'maya' itself actually comes from a couple of roots meaning 'which – not' ... that which is not. So it's not like maya has any substance to it, it actually is *not*.

**Rupert:** No, *maya* does have a substance to it but it's just as the landscape in your movie has a substance to it but it's not grass and trees and mountains; when you go up to it you don't find mountains, we find "screen." The landscape is an illusion *as* a landscape but it's real as the screen. *Maya* is an illusion - as objects, selves, entities - but the illusion has a reality to it; its reality is awareness.

**Rick:** I guess maybe what this guy was getting at in his question is why could awareness not have been content to just remain in itself without all this fuss of a universe? And it almost seems like something is gained through the whole manifestation, where it can become a *living reality* – there can be Rupert and Rick here actually talking about it, as opposed to flat, unmanifest awareness.

**Rupert:** You see, with that very question Rick we create the duality for which we then seek a cause. Why is there all this duality? There isn't! There is no duality. So with the question of "Why all this palaver of a creation, why all this duality, why wouldn't awareness just be happy sitting at home content?" Awareness *is* happy, sitting at home content. That's what awareness does, it just sits at home, content.

Why is there duality? With that very question, right there, the duality for which we are seeking a cause is created – with that thought. So why duality? Because you asked the question. There is no duality – there is no *real* duality. From whose point of view is there duality? There is duality from the imaginary point of view of a separate self.

From awareness's point of view, which is the only real point of view, there *is no* separation, nothing is distant, nothing is separate, nothing is other, nothing is not made out of itself.

**Rick:** From your Advaita studies you may know the word 'mithiyān,' which means 'dependent reality,' where the example given is of a pot – and you being a ceramic artist should appreciate this – where we have this pot and it has functions. You can put water in it, you can put beans in it, you can use it as a drum, but when you get right down to it, it's nothing but clay. There is no pot, there's only clay.

So there is this concept of a practical reality and a concession to duality for the sake of functionality and living life, but with the understanding that it actually is nothing other than awareness.

**Rupert:** but again Rick, you're suggesting that in order to lead a practical life you have to make a concession to duality; it's not necessary. You can lead a perfectly normal, functioning, practical life without any sense of separation. You can bring up a family, go to work, run a household, and these things, in other words, practical everyday life doesn't imply that you need a separate self. All the separate self does for us in everyday life is create conflict and dysfunction. It's not necessary.

You can do the shopping, go to the grocery [store], bring up a family ... all of these things, without a sense of separation or duality. You're making enlightenment sound soooo impossible if you place it at odds with regular, functioning life, then it would be *impossible*. I mean what would we do? Go live in caves for the rest of our lives if we want to get enlightenment?

**Rick:** Well no, I'm not suggesting *that* and I'm not suggesting this implies anything to do with a recluse life or not functioning in the world or anything like that, I'm just sort of playing with the conundrum of the apparent world, the apparent reality, and giving a certain amount of credence to that in order to

actually function, you know? [Like], “This is my wife, this is my son, this is this person I don’t even know,” and yet at the same time not failing to appreciate the basic truth of the situation.

**Rupert:** Of course ... yes, but do you not think that it’s - and of course Rick, I know you realize this - that it’s possible to do all that ... to refer to my wife and my child, and to do all these things because these are the conventions of language. Or, we can use language in this way - in this very ordinary, conventional way, and go about an ordinary, more or less, conventional life - and at the *same* time *know* that the reality of all of this experience is made out of our own self.

**Rick:** Absolutely. The potter says, “Oh, this is my pot, this is my bowl, this is my ashtray,” but he knows that they’re all clay.

**Rupert:** Yeah, exactly.

**Rick:** Good. One thing that I found intriguing about your book is that more so than most people I read or listen to, you draw a distinction between stages of experience or stages of development in which initially one may realize one’s self as awareness – the “I am that” – but not yet realize that “*all* this is that.” And that in perhaps in time, or maybe perhaps you don’t want to say “time,” but eventually at some point and somehow one recognizes, “Oh, all this is the same stuff as that which I have known myself to be.”

And I found it intriguing that you drew that distinction, Maharishi used to talk that way also. Perhaps it’s our Shankaracharya background that this is coming from, I don’t know, but maybe you could touch upon that a little bit.

**Rupert:** Yes, I do make a distinction but that doesn’t mean to say that everybody has to go in this way. This experiential understanding can take place in so many different ways, so it’s just a *broad* distinction that I make and it’s basically this: that normally we think that “I am something,” in other words, “What I am is *this* body and mind. And it is I, this body and mind, that sees objects and others and the world.” And for many of us – not for all of us but for many of us – the first stage to realizing that this is not actually true of our experience is to realize, “No, it’s I-awareness that is aware of the body, mind and world; it is not I the body and mind that is aware of the world. It is I-awareness that is aware of the body, mind, world.”

So this is a realization that what I am is essentially the aware presence that knows the body, mind and world. So previously I thought I was something, I now realize that I am not something, not a thing, in other words ... nothing. I am nothing. By that I mean nothing perceivable, nothing objective; I’m not a body, I’m not a thought, I’m not a feeling, I’m not a memory, a perception, an image. I am not a thing or I am nothing.

And this is the traditional neti-neti – I’m not this, I’m not this, I’m not this. I’m that which *knows* all this; we could call it the path of exclusion. And we arrive at: I am this empty, open, presence of awareness. Now if we explore, if we stay there – we don’t have to stay there because it’s what we always are already – but if we explore what is our experience of this awareness, which means, what is awareness’s experience of itself? Because we now realize that we are is this awareness.

From *awareness's* point of view, instead of the imaginary point of view of a body-mind ... what is awareness? In my experience, what is awareness's experience of itself? We find that it has no experience of any limit in itself. It has no experience of itself ever having appeared or disappeared. In other words, it has no experience of its own birth or death. It never disappears, it's ever-present, it has no finite qualities or limitations.

So we realize in this way that what we are, or awareness, so to speak, realizes - although it always knows this about itself - that it is every-present and without limits or is infinite. So this realization that I am this ever-present, unlimited awareness, is what is sometimes called "awakening" - the knowing of our own being as it truly is, un-[apparently]-veiled by the beliefs and feelings of separation.

And this is sometimes called the witnessing position. It's a half-way stage, we could say, because it's still a position of duality but it's a much subtler duality. There is still awareness here - myself and all these objects of the body-mind. What is the relationship between my self-awareness and these objects that I now apparently witness: the body, mind, and world? And as we explore the relationship between these two, we find in fact that they are not two.

All we know of the mind is the experience of thinking and imaging, all we know of the body is sensing, all we know of the world is perceiving. And if we look deeply into the experience of thinking, sensing, and perceiving, we find first of all that there is no distance between myself and the experience of thinking, sensing, and perceiving. But more than that, we don't even find two substances there.

If we go to the experience of thinking, whatever it is that knows thinking is not separate from the thinking, it's just one substance; it's not divided into a thinker and a thought. Sensing isn't divided into one part that senses and another part that is sensed. Seeing is not divided into one part that sees and one part that is seen - it's one seamless substance and the stuff that it is made out of is the knowing of it, which is awareness.

So if we could call the first path the path of exclusion, this one is more like a path of inclusion. When having realized that I am this nothing, this no-thing-ness, this open, empty presence, we realize that that is the substance of all apparent things. So we move - first of all from "I am something" to "I am nothing," but then the next step we take is we move to "this nothingness that I am is the substance of everything" in other words, "I am everything."

So I would make the distinction between these two petitions: first of all, "I am something" - the position of ignorance, which simply means the ignoring of the reality of our experience, and we move from there to the path of understanding or wisdom - "I am empty, unlimited, ever-present awareness." And from there to the position of love, where I know myself as everything. And even that is not quite right because there is no longer "everything," there are no longer "things."

It's not that "I am all" or "I am everything;" there is simply no longer "things" left for me to be the totality of. There is just myself, just awareness, knowing itself, being itself, and that is the substance of all experience. All experience shines with the light of awareness, alone.

**Rick:** I understand perfectly well what you're saying and I've been able to *talk* this way a long, long time, but I'm not sure that I *experience* it with the same degree of clarity that you apparently do. If I hold up this cup – and I understand the whole explanation you gave in terms of this particular or any particular object - but I don't see the cup as awareness. There's not the same kind of unity that I infer from what you explain, as it appears to be from your perspective.

**Rupert:** Okay, so Rick, just look at your cup now.

**Rick:** Okay, sure.

**Rupert:** So now you're looking at it *and* touching it, that's perfect. So both these, the sight of it and the touch of it seem to validate the belief that there is an external object called a cup, made out of something other than awareness. So let's take both of these two in turn. First of all, the sight of the cup: your only knowledge of the cup when you're looking at it is the experience of seeing, is that true?

**Rick:** Correct.

**Rupert:** Now where does seeing take place? How close to you?

**Rick:** Well, infinitely close, I mean ... it's right here.

**Rupert:** Closer than close.

**Rick:** Right.

**Rupert:** And the question doesn't make sense because it *is* you.

**Rick:** Right, it's not taking place in the cup.

**Rupert:** Yeah, but there isn't a cup, there's just the experience of seeing. Now in your imagination Rick, if you were to reach into the experience of seeing and try to touch, in your actual experience, try to touch the substance out of which seeing is made. What do you find there?

**Rick:** Well ... maybe it's the limitations of language but it's not something which can be touched.

**Rupert:** Right, perfect, perfect. So there's nothing solid there, but if you had to find a word ... it's obviously made of something because the experience of seeing is real, so there must be *something*, so what would you call it?

**Rick:** Yeah, so you could use the word 'consciousness,' 'awareness' ...

**Rupert:** Yes, it's just made of the knowing of it, yes?

**Rick:** Yeah.

**Rupert:** Okay, so now the mind objects and says, "Okay, that may be so for seeing but what about when I *hold* the cup?"

**Rick:** Well with any of the senses it would be the same situation.

**Rupert:** Okay, so now you hold it. So your second form of knowledge about the cup is the experience of touching, yes? **Where does touching take place? How close to yourself?**

**Rick:** Again, in awareness, yes.

**Rupert:** And if you were to reach in and try to touch the substance that touching was made of, what do you find there?

**Rick:** Umm ... that **I am that substance; it's not something that can step apart from itself and ... "Okay, A is touching B."**

**Rupert:** Perfect. Okay, why do you tell me then that you don't experience that everything is made out of awareness with the same clarity that I do, because you've just demonstrated that that is your experience? You've never known anything other than the knowingness out of which experience is made.

**Rick:** Somehow I'm not getting it. I'm not ... it's like I've had tastes like that, like when I was in the shop buying apples one day and I was looking at the apples. And all of a sudden I was really seeing myself, while looking at the apples. Or one time my wife ran the blender in the other room and it was like ... it was me, that sound - there was a sense of self, but it's not like my 24-7, daily experience.

**Rupert:** Okay, so look around yourself now Rick, and can you tell us or can you point to something in your experience that is at a distance from yourself or made out of something other than yourself?

**Rick:** Well, it's all perceived by virtue of awareness, as you've been saying, and by virtue of the mechanics of perception – my eyes, my ears, my nose ...

**Rupert:** No, but now you're going into theory Rick; you have no knowledge of eyes and ears and nose at the moment.

**Rick:** Well if I went blind or if I close my eyes, then I'm not seeing you anymore, you know?

**Rupert:** You **still have no knowledge of your eyes at the moment, it's just a concept ... the thought is superimposing on your experience.** So you go to your *experience* now Rick, just your experience, in other words, in order to make sure that you're referring to your experience and not to memory. Just **imagine that you're a newborn baby now and this is the first experience that you have ever had, you've never had a prior experience, this is all you know. Okay, so you have no knowledge of eyes and ears, or you don't even know that you have a body, you just know the current perception,** you know the experience of **perceiving. Where is it taking place?** Don't refer to memory or ideas.

**Rick:** Well I don't remember when I was a newborn baby but ...

**Rupert:** But be like that now, be like that now. And the only reason I say to try to be like a newborn baby is to **try to get you to not refer to the past, or to an image of reality, or a memory, but just to refer to**

**your direct experience now.** Referring only to your direct experience, try to point toward something now that is at a distance from yourself, or is made from something other than yourself.

**Rick:** Well ... visual images, physical sensations, sounds, all these things are taking place, and of course I can interpret them better than I could when I was a baby. I know that's a monitor and this is my chair and stuff, but there still is this perception going on.

**Rupert:** But we're going into interpretations. I'm not asking you to interpret your experience. I can interpret my experience as a monitor and sounds and everything, but **the raw experience itself ... it's just seeing.**

**Rick:** Mm-hm. Seeing, hearing, touching.

**Rupert:** What is seeing, hearing, touching made of? Where does it take place?

**Rick:** That takes place by virtue of consciousness or in consciousness, but then the question is: that which is *seen*, that which is heard, that which is touched, I don't quite get it how I'm seeing *that* as consciousness.

**Rupert:** Okay, but where is that object that you're referring to?

**Rick:** In consciousness, registering in consciousness.

**Rupert:** So when you speak about the "seen," the "heard," the object that we see, the object that we hear, the object that we touch, show us that object. Where is it? Where do you find it? Point now ... around ... we can't see very much of you but ...

**Rick:** Well, if you and I were in the same room, I'm looking at things and I can say, "Rupert, here's my monitor, here's my wife, here's a water bottle, here's a cup."

**Rupert:** We're not talking about "if" Rick, we're talking about *this* experience, not an imaginary experience; *this* experience now. Point to something in your experience now that is at a distance from yourself and made out of something other than yourself.

**Rick:** Can't really do that.

**Rupert:** Perfect, perfect. Can you ever do that?

**Rick:** Well, let me qualify. I can't say that anything in my experience is there through any means other than consciousness perceiving it – and I don't mean to be stubborn and drag this on this too long - but I **still don't quite get how the thing being perceived is consciousness. Consciousness is enabling the perception,** but how is it that the thing being perceived is **made** of consciousness? My monitor appears to be made of plastic and metal ...

**Rupert:** Because you keep going back to this idea of a "thing" existing independently, in its own right, that is known by consciousness. That is true, relatively speaking, but now we're going *beyond* that **understanding to something that is truer. Nothing we say is absolutely true,** but we're going beyond this

second stage, the halfway house that we talked about where we said, yes, awareness is aware of the objects; we're going much more deeply into our experience now.

Where is this separate object that you keep referring to, this *thing* has existence in its own right? You keep saying, "My monitor is made out of ...," but when you go to your monitor your only experience of this monitor is seeing and touching. Is seeing made out of metal? Is it made out of something solid and dense and inert, or is it made out of the totally *alive* substance of awareness, of knowing, of seeing? There's no dead matter there; it's made out of something that is totally alive. You could say that it was just made out of experiencing.

What is this thing or object that you keep referring to? Show us an object now Rick that has its own independent reality or existence. Where do you find such an object?

**Rick:** From my ability to know things, nothing has independent reality or existence; it only exists in my world if I perceive it. Which is not to say that it doesn't exist in somebody else's world, I mean, I'm sure there are things in your room right now that you are perceiving that I'm not, that for you have existence but they don't for me, because I'm unaware of their existence.

**Rupert:** There are no things in my room at the moment Rick and there's no room, there's just the experience of seeing. All I'm aware of now is seeing, touching, and hearing. I don't take place *inside* that. All that is made out of myself. We could say that it takes place *in* myself, but even that's not true because I-awareness am not like a big, open, empty space; I'm dimensionless and all this – all this seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, is made out of this dimensionless, ever-present awareness that I am. And I'm trying to suggest that that's all you know of experience, as well.

Of course I'm perfectly capable of conceptualizing, when necessary, an object, a room, a person, a chair, a screen, and I – or rather "thought" - regularly conceptualizes experience in this way, when necessary. But the difference is that I don't believe that these concepts refer to something that is actually true. In other words, I don't really believe there are solid, independently existing objects made out of dead, inert stuff called matter, because that's not my experience. It doesn't stop me from using these concepts but I don't believe that the concepts are true.

In my heart I stick to the truth of my experience, which is that everything, *everything* is made out of this alive, aware substance which is myself. In other words, that everything is myself.

**Rick:** I'm going to have to keep deepening in my clarity on that, I mean I don't want to belabor it too much, but on the other hand I don't want to insincerely say, "Okay Rupert, I got it;" it's something that I think I have to grow into with greater clarity. And as I say, I've been talking this way and understanding these concepts for ages but I just have the sense that there is a degree of genuineness and clarity which can be lived, which I am not living as fully as I might. Does that make sense? Do you think I'm hanging myself up by even *talking* that way or does that seem like a sincere observation?

**Rupert:** Not at all. No Rick, not at all. I find this whole conversation is very sincere and I've just been exploring with you the real nature of our experience. You're being totally sincere, all the way through ... I respect that.

**Rick:** Yeah, and it's beautiful the way you do it, I mean, I would love to sit with you every day and do this! It's really great, I can see why you've shifted from being a ceramic artist to being a fulltime teacher. ☺

One thing that segues from this that I wanted to talk about is that - and perhaps you can allude to your experience as a fulltime teacher, if you don't mind the word 'teacher' - and that is that one can speak from one's own level of experience, one can't really do anything other than that, really, but people are hearing from *their* level of experience, and often there is an apparent gulf.

And sometimes it seems to me that people learn the words, and they learn the terminology, and they mistake that terminology for the realization to which it points. They can become very conversant with that, they can even turn around and become teachers *themselves* when in fact, they've only gotten really good with the terminology and haven't realized, in its fullness, the state to which that terminology refers. Do you care to comment on that?

**Rupert:** Yes, I think something I've realized over the last couple of years is that teaching itself is an art; it's an art form, it's not just a skill. It's a skill but it's more than a skill, it's an art form and it requires tremendous sensitivity. And I agree with you completely that just to speak the kosher nondual words doesn't qualify one as a teacher. In fact, if one is truly coming from the experience - if we can it an experience, or let's call it ... from the experiential understanding towards which the nondual teaching points, then it frees us completely from any convention of teaching.

Now in response to a question that this type of true nondual teaching *may* respond with perfectly kosher nondual language, but in another situation it may not. The teaching may seem to condone the apparently separate self that is concealed, more or less, in the question. It may even suggest to that separate self, "Why don't you try doing this? Why don't you explore this? Why don't you investigate this?"

No the nondual fundamentalists will say, "Oh no, you're just promoting the sense of separation, you're giving the separate self something to do, therefore you're not teaching the true nondual teaching." I find this approach really fundamentalist because there is no *true* nondual teaching. The only thing that qualifies a teaching as being nondual is that if it comes truly from that understanding, and if it does, it's then completely free to use *any* kind of teaching skill or method, *including* apparently dualistic or progressive methods.

And I would far rather hear a teaching that seemed to condone the sense of separation, that says to an apparently separate self, "Why don't you try doing this? Why don't you explore this? Maybe you could investigate that." I would far rather hear that than hear every single question answered with the, "Oh, there's nobody there. There's nothing to do, everything is made out of awareness."

In other words, if there's a standard answer to all questions, that, to my mind, is suspect. It may be true – I'm not suggesting that all such responses are untrue, but if we only take the absolute point of view ... in fact, **if we truly take the absolute point of view, we would never open our mouths**. Anyone that speaks about this, anyone that says anything about it at all is *already* making a concession to apparent dualism.

Just by using the word 'awareness' we are subtly implying that there is something other than awareness – *right* there we imply duality. So once we're speaking about this we have to be honest enough and say, "Whatever we say is not quite right, so I'm just going to do my very best to tailor this love and understanding to the question, and be completely free to use language in *whatever* way seems appropriate at that time, for that particular question, even if it would seem to condone the sense of being a separate entity."

**Rick:** I'm not an expert on Ramana Maharishi but as I understand it, he was quite accommodating in that respect.

**Rupert:** Absolutely.

**Rick:** You know, he would recommend or condone all sorts of things according to the individual's state of progress or make up or whatever. Also, if you think about it, **Advaita-Vedanta is only one of six systems of Indian philosophy, and as opposed to what some commentators think, those systems were not competing; they were complementary, and they catered to people at different stages of their development**. And Vedanta means 'end of the Vedas,' so you may need to go through a bunch of stuff before you get to the end.

**Rupert:** Well, that's a slightly different approach from what I'm sharing here which is sometimes referred to as **'the direct path,' where we go straight to the reality of our experience**, just straightaway, we go there. However, that doesn't imply that there isn't an exploration of our experience both before ... in order to enable us to go directly to our experience, there may be some investigation. And also, once the nature of our experience has become clear, there may be a *further* process of exploration where the **old residues of thinking and feeling on behalf of separation are gradually realigned with our new understanding**.

So the direct path is very free. It is direct, but that doesn't mean to say that it *always* and only, back to back, the absolute truth. And you referred to Ramana Maharishi and the different levels – if we can call them levels of teaching – yes, he said in fact that silence was the highest teaching, and one of the reasons for this is that the *true* nondual understanding cannot be put in words. And if we're not willing to make a concession to language, and some people aren't, then we should keep quiet.

And nothing wrong with keeping quiet if we think, "Okay, it's impossible to say one word about this that is *absolutely* true." So either we say, "I'll keep quiet," or we say, "I'll just do my very best with these clumsy, abstract symbols called words, knowing that nothing I say is absolutely true. But nevertheless, it's true in the moment, *in* response to that particular question."

**Rick:** Yeah, beautiful. You might say to those who insist that any concession with duality is a reinforcement of it, and that there's no one to practice anything therefore you shouldn't practice, that there's also no one to eat anything therefore you better give that up. ☺

**Rupert:** Yes. I have no quarrel with people who only want to take the absolute point of view; it's beautiful in its own way. But if you then want to speak about it, then what are you going to say about it? Because as soon as we open our mouths, as I said earlier, as soon as we say "awareness" or "presence" or "myself," any of these words, *right* there we're implying the possibility of two things: something that is not awareness, something that is not myself.

So we have to acknowledge this limitation of language and work within these limitations. And I'd just like to add one thing to this conversation about teaching, it's not really that ... true teaching doesn't just take place at the level of the mind and exchange of words, it's really that the words come latent with their origin. They come full, permeated, saturated with the place from which they come, if they truly come from silence. If they come from experiential understanding, then somehow they deliver that.

Even if you're telling someone how to make a cup of tea or paint a wall, somehow, if that comes ... **if that's the correct response in the moment and it comes out of love and understanding, then even that, somehow, will convey, at some subliminal level, will convey the *experience* of Nonduality,** or rather, the experiential understanding. It's not *in* the words; it's where the words come from that is the true import of the teaching.

**Rick:** Yeah, it's like what you were saying about Francis earlier ... you guys could be cooking or going shopping together, but there was something being conveyed at a more subtle level.

**Rupert:** Absolutely. Yes, after the first two years with him – and I've known him for 15 years or so – after the first couple of years we had *very, very* few conversations specifically about truth. We were just spending time together talking about all kinds of things. The actual dialogue, the verbal exchange about so called "truth" or "reality" was relatively small. Not unimportant, it had its place; it was very important for me, but in the total scheme of things it was relatively small.

**Rick:** Which brings up the whole notion of transmission, and I don't like *that* word because it implies taking something from point A and bringing it to point B, but if we think of it more in terms of attunement, that you had the opportunity, in being with Francis all that time, for an attunement.

**Rupert:** Yes.

**Rick:** Tuning in to his wavelength, having that become your wavelength.

**Rupert:** Exactly, it's more like that than a transmission. I agree with you, yes.

**Rick:** Yeah, and just to loop back for a second and then we'll wrap it up in a minute ... would you agree that your 20 years of studying Vedanta and doing meditation and everything you did was not a waste? Earlier you alluded to it as preparatory, it seems like you appreciated the time spent doing that in preparation for meeting Francis.

**Rupert:** Rick, for myself, it was *absolutely* necessary, every single day of it was necessary, nothing could have been bypassed. And for others, for some others, a similar kind of apparent preparation will also be necessary, but for others, not.

If I can just elaborate on that very slightly, is that this so called “enlightenment,” although I actually never use the word because like “God,” it’s become so laden with interpretation, but this knowing of our own being as it truly is, it is not an experience.

When our being is realized as it is, it’s true that a certain contraction of the body-mind is let go, is dissipated. And this sends a wave of energy through the body and the mind, which in some people may be extremely colorful, in others it may go almost unnoticed. But this extraordinary wave in the body-mind is really the *after*-effect of the nonexperience, the transparent nonexperience of enlightenment, but it is often mistaken for enlightenment. It’s got nothing to do with enlightenment.

Enlightenment itself is a nonevent, a colorless, transparent knowingness. And sometimes it’s accompanied with these exotic experiences, but sometimes it can be so quiet that it goes unnoticed by the mind. At the other end of the spectrum it can be so quiet that it’s not even noticed, and one day the mind turns around and it may just say, “Oh, oh, that, yes, yes.”

But your life may carry on almost seamlessly, whereas for another person, they may be walking down the road with *no* prior experience or interest or preparation; this understanding may just fall into their lap, as it were. And for the next five years the rug is just totally pulled out from underneath them – they’re disorientated, they can’t go back to their lives, they can’t go back to their relationship, to their work ... nothing makes sense anymore. So both of these two are possible and of course, everything in-between.

So to go back to your question, yes, for me it was necessary. It may be necessary for others, maybe not.

**Rick:** Yeah, I’m glad you mentioned that because both Eckhart Tolle and Byron Katie had awakenings like that, which were not preceded by any practice and which were quite sudden and abrupt. And they basically had to sit around the park bench for a couple of years, you know, getting oriented and integrated. But that’s the exception rather than the rule, I would say.

**Rupert:** Yes, you see, most people ... they do the integration process as they ...

**Rick:** As they go along, yes.

**Rupert:** As they go along the body-mind is *slowly* being integrated with their understanding. So when this nonevent called enlightenment is realized, when the knowing of our own being as it is is realized, the body-mind may already be largely realigned. There may be no big deal, it may just be, “Oh yes, of course, of course, of course, that’s so obvious now, *of* course. I see clearly now.” And then you may just go back to work the next morning.

**Rick:** Yeah, and it might have been a big deal if they had somehow magically *jumped* from where they had been 20 years ago to this, but it didn't happen that way. There was a 20-year process of integration and adjustment.

**Rupert:** Yes. In other words, you either do the integration before or after; it doesn't really matter which. It is a body-mind that has been used to serving a sense of separation for 20, 30, 40 years, and is going to be full of old contractions and tensions. Those have got to be washed out of the system, it doesn't matter when; it's either going to be before, or after, or in most cases, a bit of both.

**Rick:** Yeah, and I just wanted to bring up the thing a minute ago about your appreciation of the practice you did do over those years, just because I see a trend sometimes where people hear Nonduality teachers speaking and saying, "There is no one to do anything and you don't have to do anything," and it almost seems like it's not necessarily a universal instruction and it is sometimes used as a sort of alibi for laziness, or for *not* doing something when it might be appropriate for that particular individual to do this or that. Again, it's just not a universal instruction, in my understanding.

**Rupert:** That's right. You may be having a meeting and with a person there may be a question, you may say, "Well actually, who is this one that wants to still the mind, or who is the one that wants to do that?" In other words, you may completely undermine any attempt to do something with a goal of enlightenment. But then two minutes later you may be asked another question by another person and you may say, "Why don't you just stop for a minute and explore your experience? Just have a look, look around you (at whatever it is)." And you may then suggest some kind of investigation or exploration.

So these two answers would seem to contradict each other but they *don't* contradict each other, because they come from the same place. Where they come from is uniquely tailored – lovingly and uniquely tailored to each question, and could *appear* to give very different answers, but they're not. It's the same love and understanding that is being refracted and tailored sensitively, lovingly, to each question, to each situation -that is the art of teaching.

**Rick:** Yeah, beautiful, I love that phrase, "the art of teaching." And you're only 51 so hopefully for a few decades more you will be refining that art.

**Rupert:** It is constantly refined. The form, as you rightly say, if it's alive, it's always finding new shapes, new words, it's always moving and changing, and yes, as you say, refining itself.

**Rick:** How about your experience itself? And here I go again ... I said I was going to wrap this up but, your teaching art is refining, but how about your actual, subjective living of life, is there some refinement to that?

**Rupert:** Yes, yes.

**Rick:** And how would you characterize that?

**Rupert:** I'm glad you asked that question because so often - and I think this goes back to our earlier conversation about those of us who went to India, that saw enlightenment as kind of the "end goal" – in

fact, what I've realized is that enlightenment (or what is called "enlightenment" or "awakening to one's true nature"), is really just the end of one chapter. It puts the chapter called "the separate me" to an end; it's the end of that chapter. Now, old habits of thinking, feeling, acting, perceiving, and relating on behalf of a separate self continue for some time because we've been rehearsing them for whatever it is ... 30, 40, 50 years. They have some momentum to them, they keep going.

So these old habits in the way we act, the way we relate, the way we perceive, the way we move, the way we sit, the way we think, the way we feel – all these [ways of the] separate self-ness are gradually washed out of the system, and what I'm realizing is that there is no end to that process. In the Christian tradition it's what I think is referred to as transfiguration, it's when the whole of the body-mind world mechanism is gradually permeated, more and more permeated with the light of awareness.

It's one thing to recognize the light of awareness and to recognize that it is ever-present and without limits, but it's another thing for the body to be totally saturated in it. And not just the body but the world, to allow the old ways of moving, acting, relating, and perceiving, to be completely flooded by this experiential understanding.

And to answer your question Rick, yes, that is a process that carries on, and I hope it always carries on. It's a process that I don't think there can be an end to. In other words, in ignorance – if we can use that phrase without it sounding pejorative – when we ignore the reality of our experience, what we are, this light of awareness, seems to become like a body and a mind. In other words, it becomes temporal, local, limited. In understanding, or love, it is the other way around; the body and the mind and the world become more and more and more like the light of awareness; they become permeated, saturated, and they become more transparent, more open, and more loving, until our experience – not just our understanding but our actual experience of the body and the world is one in which everything (the body, the mind, and the world) is saturated and permeated with the light of awareness.

**Rick:** That's actually what I was trying to get at before when I was holding up my cup and we were having that interchange. I just have this sense that everything could ... that there could be refinement such that everything could be much more saturated than it is. And the word 'God' comes to mind ... I know that word has so many connotations but, there's a sort of Divine intelligence that I intuit in everything, and it seems to me that That could become much more evident.

**Rupert:** Yes, I think you're right Rick. I think that after this realization of our true being, in a way, we just surrender the body and the mind and the world to this Presence. And it's like if you imagine a glass of water, and you take a drop of milk and you drop the milk in the water. To begin with, it has its own name and its own form, but it gradually ... the water permeates the drop of milk and the drop of milk loses its name and its form. And so to begin with, it becomes this kind of vaporous cloudlike form, but in time, even that, the water so permeates the milk that the milk becomes water; it becomes so saturated with the water that there's no trace of its name or form left. It just becomes the water.

So that is the process that you're referring to, which I think is a never-ending process, where the body and the world, as well as the mind, just become totally saturated with this love, with this light, with this transparency.

**Rick:** Mm, beautiful. Well okay, now I can end 😊 . Now I feel like, “Ahh, now we’ve really sort of come home here.” That’s very beautiful. So, I’ve really enjoyed this conversation Rup and I knew I would, in reading your book and meeting you a couple of weeks ago.

**Rupert:** I have too, Rick. Thank you.

**Rick:** And you know, I have a *long* list of people, but maybe we could do another one in a couple of years, or next time you write another book ...

**Rupert:** Sure, of course, this form is evolving. Love to Rick, thank you very much.

**Rick:** Yeah, we’ll check in. Now let me just make a couple of concluding comments before you disconnect, just for those listening. This interview that I’ve been doing with Rupert Spira is one in a continuing series. I do a new one just about every week. And they are all available if you go to [www.BATGAP.com](http://www.BATGAP.com) , which is an acronym for *Buddha at the Gas Pump*.

And if you go there you can also sign up for an email newsletter that I send out once a week, each time a new interview is put up you’ll be notified. And there’s also a little discussion group that springs up around each interview – in case you care to ... and sometimes the author will come in and answer a question or two that someone has posted.

Also, if you are a commuter or like to listen to things on an MP3 player, this is available as a podcast. Some people report that they listen while commuting or riding their horse, or whatever, so you’ll see links for that at the site: [www.BATGAP.com](http://www.BATGAP.com).

So thank you for watching, thank you again Rupert, very much, I really appreciate this conversation. And next week, if all goes as planned, I will be interviewing John Bernie, who’s in California, and the week after that, Mooji. So thanks a lot and we’ll see you next time.

**Rupert:** Thank you, Rick.

**Rick:** Thank you!

{BATGAP theme music plays}