

Benjamin Smythe #117

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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 Benjamin Smythe. Welcome Benjamin.

>>**Benj:** Hi Rick.

>>**Rick:** And Benjamin is a really fun guy, I think I deserve the coffee mug or the t-shirt or even the little satchel that you might give out for people who actually listen to all of your YouTube videos, because I've listened to all 78 of them, and if that doesn't deserve a prize, nothing does.

>>**Benj:** You get a prize. We give out pacifiers.

>>**Rick:** And you're a fun guy, you know, you're sort of a performance artist of Nonduality, we might say, as people will see when they watch your videos. And I really appreciate your sensitivity and ... I mean, you're a tender-hearted guy. I've seen you laugh uncontrollably and break into tears, and just go through all sort of what I would say are very sensitive fluctuations of emotion that you don't always see people display publicly. So that's nice.

And I would also say you're sort of a gutsy guy, I mean, you've spent countless hours sitting out on the street with a "You're Perfect" sign. And I guess you're known in some parts as the "You're Perfect" guy, and that's kind of cool, so we'll talk about that.

One thing I was curious about, when we were setting up this interview at one point you emailed me and said you didn't want to do it, then you emailed back and said, "I want to do it, after all." What was going on with that? Were you afraid I would give you a hard time or that I had bad breath, or was it totally unrelated to anything?

>>**Benj:** It was unrelated. I had this small ... this period where I realized I needed to be quiet for a while and I didn't know how long that was going to be. So I actually cancelled all my trips and it ended up lasting only for about 4 or 5 days of not talking, then it was like, "Okay, talk again." There was something I needed to learn in there, and then I just set everything back up, but it wasn't you.

>>**Rick:** Okay, I won't take it personally then. Well you know, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you.

>>**Benj:** We could talk about *that* later too!

>>**Rick:** Well I can understand the need to be quiet thing too, I mean, sometimes some people ask me why *I* don't teach, and I actually *did* teach for about 25 years; I was a teacher of meditation, but a lot of the times I was just parroting stuff that I had been taught to say. And I just reached a point, and I'm still

at a point where I don't want to say anything unless I'm really saying it from my own experience, genuinely. **No extrapolation, no speculation – unless I make it clear that I'm speculating** ... just, you know, I'd rather sell shoes or something.

>>**Benj**: Yeah, I met a man, Phillip Moffitt, he teaches in the Spirit Rock Meditation community, and I was going to teach a yoga class when I was younger, like maybe 23, and I said, "Oh, I'm a little nervous," and he said, "Well talk about what you actually know." And it was like, "Oh, okay, well I can do that" – like don't talk about anything I don't understand or I haven't experienced myself. So I hear you, that's integrity and it's important because it's obviously easier to philosophize all along.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, and there are plenty of voices out there that I feel are a lot more articulate than mine, so why should I duplicate their efforts? I'm good at asking questions so I'm doing this now, you know?

>>**Benj**: Yeah. Well the thing I would say is that every time somebody pops up and starts sharing from the groundhog hole of their experience, there's a resonance that just starts spreading out. And sure, you know, you've been in the circle for a long time and you've had a lot of experiences, so obviously there are a lot of people doing all kinds of stuff, but because you know it here, that doesn't mean your neighbor knows about it, or that doesn't mean the guy down the street knows about it. So everybody who shares, if they're doing it authentically, from their heart I would say, it's going to touch somebody and that's very important.

You don't have to be a 5,000 or 10,000 crowd-pleaser, you don't have to draw a big audience; you could draw two people but those two people matter. And so really, if you want to have any sense of wanting to share, there's no reason to hesitate; it doesn't have to look humungous.

>>**Rick**: No, that's a good point, and I think that's part of the reason why there are so many teachers these days, it's just like the Internet itself. It's kind of a many-to-many matrix rather than a one-to-many setup, and it seems to be characteristic of the times, both technologically and spiritually.

>>**Benj**: Right, and that's the good *and* a bad side of it because anybody can do it, and so then it's kind of wading through of ... wait, where's the authenticity in there? But I think people can feel that pretty quickly; something does resonate, whether or not it resonates with everyone.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, and if nothing else, maybe it's necessary for people to fine-tune their bullshit detectors, and so there's plenty of opportunity for that.

>>**Benj**: There's nothing like the Internet for that!

>>**Rick**: It must be true, I saw it on the Internet!

>>**Benj**: Yeah, good ol' Facebook, and you wade through all kinds of arguments within the conversation and you get to the point where you're like, "Cool, I'm done with that, I don't want to argue anymore. Where's the love?"

>>**Rick:** Yeah, that's an ironic thing too. You see these guys getting *really nasty* about Nonduality ...  
"Anybody who says such and such is full of it, this is the truth!"

>>**Benj:** Well that's part of it, I mean, in a funny way, that's Nonduality – being grumpy, being a pain in the ass.

**Rick:** Yeah, well in that respect, everything is Nonduality.

>>**Benj:** Yeah, yeah. That's the bad news and the good news; nothing is off limits.

>>**Rick:** So let's get into the Ben-story a little bit, just for fun. I've heard it because I've listened to all your videos, but please tell it again for those who haven't.

>>**Benj:** In 2008, after a long time of seeking, in that classic of way of sitting Za-Zen, playing with everything I could play with...

>>**Rick:** Formal teachers and all?

>>**Benj:** No. I'd go to retreats but I never actually worked with anybody particularly. I had a pretty negative experience when I was 19 with a teacher and I thought, "You know what? Maybe they're all kind of nuts," so I just sat by myself and would go in and out of communities. And there are positives and negatives to that – I got to make a lot of mistakes, sort of learned the hard way.

But I hit this bottom, I hit this exhaustion, and at the bottom of that, I sat out under the stars one night and stepped onto my deck, and from the most honest place in my heart was this whisper, "God?" It was like the [very] bottom ... "God?" **And nothing happened, and everything answered.**

And it was just like that (snaps his fingers), everything answered: this is it, everything is God, Energy, whatever you want to play philosophically. But there was a felt sense of it and it's never really stopped answering. I've just had to learn, like many people do, I think, how to play out the momentum of the conditioning not from necessarily the life before, but just from all the beliefs from before. And I've done that in a very messy way, out loud on the Internet.

And that's been very funny, because at least at this point, from where I'm sitting now, I can see that it happened that way and that there are more mature ways to do that. So at this point I find myself calming down, even though I have fun, but I don't ... it just feels very clear to just stay close to the love.

>>**Rick:** Well I think you've done people a service by displaying your working out of the conditioning because I think maybe some people erroneously assume that awakening is this clean break, night and day, on and off kind of transition where you are just like Mr. Perfect after that. And you know, I don't think that's happened in the history of humanity; there is always stuff to work out.

And even the most advanced or popular teachers that you talk to these days, if they're honest, which I would say that the most mature ones are, they say, "Yeah, I'm still working stuff out." And they usually say, "Well, it doesn't grip me like it used to." Even Nisargadatta, someone asked him, "Do you ever get kind of overshadowed?" And he said, "Yeah, but it only lasts a moment and then pyooh! – I'm out of it."

>>**Benj:** Yeah, that definitely feels true from my experience, is that things just don't last as long when they stick. It's very easy [to notice], "Oh, I'm believing this," or "I'm getting caught in this," and then it just sort of drops away. But I find **this is an endless learning process; there's no "arriving" as far as I can tell**, it's just constantly opening and opening and opening, and learning how to be a good person. Which is really funny because in the end I really feel like that's it - learning how to help my neighbors and be a good human being, and get rid of the pomp, and get rid of the arrogance, and get rid of the "I have something," and just be a *really good* person, which is not an easy task.

We can all do our best, and our best is *really* much bigger than we want to admit. And that's the relationship I'm always playing with: **how do I do my best when my best is giving me my organs?** And yeah, I want to do my best but sometimes even my best scares me.

>>**Rick:** Hmm. There's a cool metaphor I've said before here but you might enjoy it, which is used in the Vedic tradition, where someone who is deeply conditioned and perhaps not awakened might ... their impression is like making a line in stone; it etches in and lasts a long time. A little bit more freedom, a little bit less conditioning, and it's like making a line in sand maybe. And then a line in water, and then a line in air.

So you still have the experiences, in fact you can make a deeper line in water than you can in stone – deeper, richer experience – but it just goes away right away. And so what you just said about conditioning, that it doesn't last, it's like water off a duck's back, just pyooh! You experience, it's gone, you don't hang on to it for 20 years.

>>**Benj:** What I'm finding too is that new stuff comes, like deep, deep ... from one years-old, two years-old stuff, like wanting to be held by my father or wanting my mother to listen to me. And that stuff comes out and it's very beautiful to be like, "Oh, okay," playing that out as best I can and not running from it or trying to philosophize it away, but just cry and feel it and *really* let that out.

It's like really going back to sitting in the womb, before everything was scary, like, "Wow, this is going to be great," and then seemingly have that be very close to the lived experience now. But I think it's just endless learning; there's so much to learn.

>>**Rick:** Before we lose it, I just want to say that sometimes in spiritual circles these days seeking is poo-poo'd, it's dismissed as being a waste of time or something you should drop or shouldn't do, or something like that, but Patanjali, who wrote the Yoga Sutras, said that the degree of intensity of the seeker in a way actually determines the rapidity with which realization occurs. He classified seekers as mild, medium, intense, and *vehemently* intense.

And you often see this, I mean, in your own case you were a pretty ardent seeker I would say, as from what I've gathered. And that thing when you went out on the back porch and said, "God," you weren't being ambivalent or wishy-washy, there was an earnest yearning desire to like, you know, "What the hell is going on?"

>>Benj: Yeah, I was as dumb as I could ever have been, and I've never been as humble in my life as in that moment.

>>Rick: Yeah, and that combination of humility and earnestness - sincere desire for realization or whatever term we want to use – bore fruit.

>>Benj: Yeah, and then what's funny is I find now remembering that humility ... it's not difficult but that's really the key, is to just keep remembering that humility, that place of being right there at the bottom and feeling that wow – the wonder of there. And then not moving too far from that because then all of a sudden ... and I've done it you know, you get into the games of it and there's sort of a social currency to the whole spiritual conversation. And then there's the arguing, and then there's the ... and it's like, "What does *any* of this have to do with that love?"

And I'm learning, again, I'm learning. Like okay, play, and then, "Oh, that doesn't feel good," go back down and play. So it's this kind of dancing there but it feels very important to remember, for *me* to remember that moment of knowing nothing and just reaching out and trying to stay there. And I'm not good at that all the time because I like to be clever and I like to play with words, but I do my best.

>>Rick: That's nice. There's a verse, I think it's in the Gita or someplace, where Lord Krishna says, "Curving back on myself, I create again and again," and it's reminiscent of what you just said, it's like you just keep coming back. So you expand and creativity and playfulness and activities and so on, but you always keep coming back to that humble state, as you put it.

>>Benj: Yeah, there's a still point, obviously it's right here, and so it's that still point where nothing is really moving and happening, and there's not too much. And then from there, there seems to be endless creativity and compassion and caring, and playfulness and goofiness, and just keeping it close to that.

>>Rick: Well it's kind of the way the universe works. I mean, a physicist would tell you that there's a level of silence and stillness and whatnot on which nothing is happening and nothing has ever happened – it's kind of the ground state of the universe, and at the same time, inherent within that, is infinite dynamism and infinite creativity, which then manifests as this whole incredible, marvelous universe. And we're like little encapsulations of that process, as human beings; we're experiencing the same dynamics within ourselves as the universe itself goes by, and its whole process of functioning.

>>Benj: What I love about that is that the universe is saying that.

>>Rick: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

>>Benj: Like language itself is alive! And this is where the idea of memes and memetics makes a lot of sense, because the culture and the information is alive, we're literally playing catch with it ... from brain to brain right here, then we walk away and we meet somebody else, we say something.

So I love thinking of language as an organism moving through bodies that are busy trying to stay healthy and alive. Because it seems like, "Oh, I'm speaking," but when you get down to it, it's like here is the universe talking and passing more information on to itself, seemingly to open wider and wider to the

wow that it is. What I love is that everything we know, we know everything except for what just happened around the world right now.

Even the physics, even the theories, *all* of that is spoken from this position that *just* happened a second ago. Because this is in motion, right? We're aging, we're slowly moving in a direction. So it's really beautiful that no matter what I come up with, I'm missing what just happened. I'm missing the information that just happened. I can extrapolate and confer from everything I know, but I can't talk about what's over right now and what just happened.

>>Rick: But that's not a problem, right?

>>Benj: It doesn't feel like a problem at all, in fact it feels wonderful, because then this part of me which is trying to come up with a conclusion, which doesn't happen as much anymore, it's like, "Okay, fine, I don't get to know," and then it's more like wonder, and there's awe.

And awe is the most fascinating emotion because why does awe arise? You know, love makes sense because we want to work together, but *awe*? – just that wow-quality of a sunset or a kiss, or a really good experience with someone or a place, it's just ... I feel like that's the moment when the universe sees itself and goes, "Oh! Wow! Wow!" Even right now, looking at you, one of a kind, never before. Like, "Look at you! Wow! Wow!"

>>Rick: Yeah, nobody gets a nose like this.

>>Benj: Well that's a good one, that's a good one.

>>Rick: They used to call me Pinocchio in the second grade.

>>Benj: Well it has a nice little slope, yeah, it's great. It's the only nose like that in the world.

>>Rick: Yeah, in fact, my father once said to me, "Where'd you get that *beak*?"

>>Benj: Oh yeah, you go, "From you, brother."

>>Rick: Well it doesn't look like his nose.

>>Benj: O oh ... well, it's the milkman.

>>Rick: Yeah, we actually did have a milkman in those days. Hmm.

>>Benj: Oh, well there you go.

>>Rick: I said this last week so I don't want to be too repetitive, but what you just said triggered it - this "remembrance." I am on Eckhart Tolle's mass email list that he sends out, the "Present Moment Reminder," he calls it. And he sent out one where he said, "Ultimately we're not persons, we're focal points through which the universe knows itself," and that's kind of what you just said.

Also, I would like to take it another step and say, the *universe* is a focal point through which consciousness knows itself and we are little parts of that massive trillion-faceted focal point. So we are just consciousness knowing itself and having created a marvelous instrumentality through which it can know itself, you know ... this human nervous system is incredible.

>>Benj: Yes, and what I love is that *either* way, whether we take one, whichever direction you come at, it looks exactly like this ... it's so simple, it looks exactly like this, it looks like "having a conversation with you." And that's it, there's nothing more miraculous than the ordinary, as far as I can tell.

>>Rick: Yeah ... that thing you said a minute ago about whatever we're saying now we can't really know what happened a minute ago, or however...

>>Benj: Yeah, I don't know what happened a second ago ... around the globe! I mean, if we're thinking of information as a living organism, I'm missing information, I have to be honest about that. So as long as I'm making my conclusion, I'm missing information. Or if I'm coming up with a model of what's going on, well I'm inside the model, *and* this is in motion, so I have to take that into account, that the model-maker is also moving, and if the model is moving [too]...

So if I say, "It's like this!" I have to be open to the reality of Gödel's incompleteness theorem, where I'm *always* going to be missing something. So it's so much nicer, I find, to not live with a conclusion and just be open and be open and be open and be open.

>>Rick: Yeah. Somehow the image comes to mind of riding a bicycle, where the only way to balance is to keep riding. If you stop it and say, "Okay, I'm going to capture this point here on the street" – boom! You fall over; you have to kind of keep going. And you can't use the balancing that you did a minute ago to take care of what you're doing right now; it's just an ongoing thing.

>>Benj: Yeah, that's the beauty of this as a momentum. We can go from the awareness perspective and you can argue that nothing is happening, but that's not really practical. So it's more like everything is in motion, energy is in motion. And aging is such a wonderful ... aging is so sweet, it's so obvious that I'm aging. I can come up with all kinds of philosophical perspectives but the body is moving in one direction, so to me that's a great grounding point in all the philosophy of ... like to me it's like, "Oh yeah, the body is aging, okay."

>>Rick: It is, but you know what you just said about nothing happening? Don't you sense that as the body ages, at the same time, there is something which doesn't age?

>>Benj: Ughhh ... I can see that but that's kind of inferred from memory. If anything I think spoken in time allows memory to have a little bit more of say, then I think it actually does, in the immediacy of the experience. So I hear that as a point but even then, it's like I'm not really sure because I have to use my memories to make that point and where are they now? Where are my memories now?

>>Rick: Yeeeah, let's stress this point a little bit...

>>Benj: Yeah, let's play, let's play. We've been so nice to each other ... come on!

>>**Rick**: Are we going to get nasty?

>>**Benj**: No, no, no. Not nasty, just wrestle.

>>**Rick**: Oh, okay. You'd probably whip my ... you're tougher and younger, and speaking of aging, yeah, you're a lot stronger. Just this point of there being ... I thought about this point actually as I was listening to your videos because you have your "You're Perfect" sign and now you're talking about aging. And it's like simultaneously there are different paradoxical realities here, each true in its own right although contradictory to the other coexisting reality.

So it's like everything is perfect, on the other hand you might have a stroke or a heart attack or something which may not seem so perfect, and you can actually take measures to help avert those sorts of things: eat right, exercise, stuff like that. So everything is perfect doesn't mean just whatever happens; it means you actually still have volition to steer the course of life in this or that, or you appear to anyway. And then at the very same time, there is a level of reality at which it's all unmanifest, transcendent, nothing every happened, nothing is perfect because there is no *thing* to be perfect or imperfect, and all those things kind of fit nicely together.

I think if we look at our experience it's not just philosophical or theoretical or hypothetical, you can grok that within your experience, can't you?

>>**Benj**: I think so too ... because paradoxes only exist in language. If we shut up and we're not talking to ourselves, there is no paradox. In some ways, there's a lot of ways to create these different angles, like a prism – you turn it and the light changes - but in the immediacy of this, sitting here together, there's not much that's confusing. And that to me is always the sweet news, it's like, "Ah, if I just shut up for a second on the inside, playing with my letters, everything is actually okay, even if it's not necessarily the greatest, it's okay."

And I agree with you that perfection includes the nasty, and includes the intelligence of taking a Tylenol when you have a headache and fixing your foot when you hurt it, you know, that's all part of it.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, and feeding the starving people...

>>**Benj**: Yes, yes, of course. And also included in that though is, "No, f-that, I want to do what I want." Because from the position of a separate person it looks like somebody is making all of these choices, so it's easy to get into comparing. But from standing on the moon looking at the earth, it's just energy moving, and so how involved do I want to get into that knit-picking? And how broad can I get? - and be like, "Okay, that's what happens here. I want to focus on the love or I want to focus on feeding people, as you said, or being kind.

And that's what I love about being on the street, because everybody is there. There's a way that the "spiritual circus," as I like to call it - in a playful way and sometimes in a derogatory way – there's a way that it can become kind of myopic, like seeking can become really self-absorbed, so that someone is working on "their own awakening," and meanwhile they're passing people who are in some kind of need.

And so it seems balancing that out like, “Yes, of course I’m looking for the wonder of my experience and wow! – what is this?” And at the same time, hopefully, **because it really does make a difference, I’m paying attention to my neighbors,**” and that seems very beneficial.

>>**Rick:** Very beneficial. I’ve seen spiritual groups in which people become *so* self-absorbed that they become downright cruel in a way; there’s just this complete focus on one’s own concerns and how one is feeling and so on, to the complete neglect of other people. And interestingly there are spiritual teachers, like for example Amma, the hugging saint, who makes a big deal out of getting out and helping people ... go out, pick up trash, go out and help build this orphanage or whatever, because it kind of gets you out of that myopia that you referred to.

>>**Benj:** Yes. Sandra just told me a great story this morning – she’s my partner, and she said that on Facebook they posted this thing where this guy was in a village in Africa, and he put a candy bar over at a tree. And he lined the kids up and said, “Okay, race towards it and whoever gets it, wins.” They all just held hands and walked, and walked, and walked together, and picked it up and shared it. And they said, “We can’t just one of us ... we have to share it with all of us.”

And that’s really it. To me that’s it, that’s it, that’s it, that’s everything. That’s the only awakening that matters, is that moment of realizing: **we are all here together, experiencing the same challenges, the same struggles, and the same sufferings. How can we hold hands as best we can and share the resources and alleviate, whatever we can of that? And I think it’s an ongoing task for the rest of my life** and I will fail at it, but it’s not up to just one person; it’s up to all of us.

But nobody is in charge too, so it gets into that fun area where it’s like, I don’t want to live in a world where it’s like, “You *have* to help you son of a b\*#@%#” – that doesn’t work either! So it seems like there’s a natural love in our heart that moves us that way, some of us.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, no, I think it’s a beautiful point. And **if you think about it, what is awakening or realization? It’s not just this little guy here having some great, big, wow experience; it’s actually an awakening to that which is universal.** And how can universal awareness have dawned and yet a person be sort of selfish and narrow-minded and all that? It seems like inevitably there’s going to be a greater broad-heartedness or open ... a tendency to ... I mean, you can’t account for personalities and there are exceptions to every generality, but **there does seem to be a trend toward people waking up and then wanting to help others** ...in whatever way they choose to do so.

>>**Benj:** Sure, that’s what it *seems* like. And it gets into that interesting conversation where, **does somebody actually wake up? Because you know, awakening does not feel personal at all,** because it’s so *obvious* that **this was how the life was going to happen;** it has nothing to do with Benjamin Smythe. And it’s not “somebody’s” experience, it’s not *my* experience; this experience belongs to everything.

And so even if somebody wakes up and it looks like they’re a jackass or whatever, that’s part of it. We have to let chaos be chaotic *in* the conversation, otherwise it begins to get really confusing ... “But wait, no, it’s chaotic,” instead of, “Okay, it’s chaotic. Cool. What does my heart want to do?” Because to me, **admitting it’s chaotic ends the philosophy on the upstairs. So now it’s like, “Move out of the haunted**

**house, what does my heart want to do?"** And that's where all the conversation makes the most sense to me – how do I help somebody? How do I help? How do I help? What do you need? How can I help? How can I help?

>>**Rick:** Yeah, that brings up two points: one is that there isn't a "somebody" who wakes up; that's a contradiction in terms, and the second one ... I don't know what the second was.

>>**Benj:** Hey, hey, **isn't it fun when you lose a thought? I mean, where does the thought go?**

>>**Rick:** Ahh, well it's just like what we're saying, this and that. You know that saying in the Bible, "My cup runneth over?" I think it's in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. **Once the cup is full, what does it do? What can it do but overflow?**

>>**Benj:** Yeah, yeah, it seems that's the benefit I find to what "You're Perfect" sign is. It's not trying to make a grok statement about a personality as much as talk about the honesty of the immediate moment. Like right now everything is this way, and from there, if I *feel* it and there's a softening to it - and this is what people tell me anyway – then they see it in other people, and that seems to be the most beneficial thing, is just passing along the love.

Well recently, I made a sign yesterday because I feel this sort of shift and I made a sign that says, "Trust love," and on the other side it says, "Breathe easy." And that feels even more beautiful because it's less of an opinion, and I think it speaks right to the part of us that really feels intuitively that love is very trustable, and that a nice way to deal with that is just be easy when we're breathing and being with ourselves.

>>**Rick:** So, "Trust love," and "Be easy."

>>**Benj:** "Trust love," and "Be easy." And it was really fun to see, it was such a different thing, because I think in some ways the "You're perfect" sign was a little bit for me, it was like, "Hey, see me, and yeah, it's for you too but Benjamin Smythe is involved." And this feels like I'm not involved at all and that feels better personally, because it's not personal.

>>**Rick:** Hmm, **you could have made a sign that said, "You're Perfect-er."** "Son of Perfect."

>>**Benj:** That's great. I mean, the part of me that likes madness is like...

>>**Rick:** So, are you retiring the "You're Perfect" sign?

>>**Benj:** Oh, I don't know, I don't know. I don't have one right now, so we'll see, we'll see, I don't know. I just kind of follow orders, whatever that means.

>>**Rick:** Let's talk about that because we've alluded to that but maybe people don't quite realize what we're talking about. So for quite a few years, I guess, you've spent quite a bit of time on the street or sitting in parks or whatever, holding this big sign that says, "You're Perfect," so what initially motivated you to do that and what sorts of interesting encounters have you had while doing that?

>>Benj: In the year 2000, I was in Laguna Beach in California and I passed by this guy – I was going to a bookstore and I passed by a homeless man – and he was *saying* it to people and he could say it in whatever language the person was walking by at. So I went up to him and I said, “Why are you doing that?” And he said, “Well I’m the only person I can’t see. So if I say it to you and you feel it, you show me what I look like.” And something in there was so beautiful to me.

So about five years later I was having a really crappy day, I was in San Francisco, and I made a sign and I went out on Lincoln Avenue, by Golden Gate Park, and I sat down on the median there, between traffic. And I was just sitting Za-Zen, I wasn’t even looking or ... it was just resting against me. And then I hear this, “Excuse me,” and this woman is crying. And she says, “Thank you. I really needed to see that.”

And there was something in that. I thought this would make my day better by giving to others and it *did*, it really worked. So I did it a little more and then I put it away, and then in 2008 when I had this experience it was like, “Oh, okay, it really *is* perfect,” it really felt like, “Oh, it is perfect.” I mean, it’s a mess, and it’s an amazing mess. So then I just started going out more and more.

And the greatest moments for me are when people come up and they have those obvious challenges that we see socially, like they have an oxygen tank, or they have a limp, or they’re missing an eye, and they’re like, “Thank you.” And it’s *not* personal and it’s very beautiful to just kind of like, “Yeah, well of course you are, of course you are,” and to share that.

And the other thing that’s amazing is when children will drive by, and you don’t even see the kid, you just see in the backseat there’s this hand that shoots out the window. And it’s this little hand and it waves. And I can’t see his face or anything. and it has that moment of just even touching the little ones. so it just has that quality where it feels very beautiful, and I love being on the street because it’s not pretentious.

You know, the street is everybody. The street is everyone and that feels very important, because it’s *very* easy to get into the subculture of Satsang and miss out on the fact that everybody who goes to Walmart is part of the conversation, and everyone who goes to the ball game is part of the conversation, and everyone who struggles at their day is part of the conversation.

So I like that that it keeps this really wide open and keeps me from, I think, becoming full of s#%@, in some ways. But I could be full of s#%@ now, so I don’t know.

>>Rick: That’s nice ... well at least your colon.

>>Benj: Oh yeah, but I have to eat fast man.

>>Rick: Yeah, hot tamales. You know it’s funny about people on the street. You know, people send around these emails like: “The people of Walmart,” and it has all these photos of people dressed outlandishly or really overweight. And I always feel like – and I do have a humor list – but I actually don’t forward those on because I sort of feel bad about it; it’s like you’re making fun of people.

And it's nice to see that there's a growing national awareness against making fun of people for who they are. Lady Gaga has got her campaign going for "Born That Way," or "Born This Way" Foundation, Oprah is really into it, and this new movie just came out called *Bully*, which is trying to raise awareness of the issue of children bullying each other in school and the suicides that result from that.

So there seems to be a dawning appreciation of the need to just appreciate people as they are, and not judge them or condemn them for being different or whatever.

>>Benj: Yeah, I think it is fun to look at like, "Why would I do that anyway?" It's great to hear about these campaigns and I love looking closely at what really ... like, does it even feel *good* to make fun of somebody? And it's sometimes with friends, you know, we're playful, we joke and we banter, and humor has its place; there's a place for comedy. But in that pointed *attacking* way, it's just, there's not a reason for that. There really is no reason for that, as far as I can see. And I've done it and I assume that at some point in a moment of unconsciousness I'll do it again, but if I can remember ... there's not a reason to make fun of somebody.

>>Rick: Yeah, the way Amma puts it is like having a knife without a handle, that's sharp on both ends - you're stabbing somebody but you're injuring your hand at the same time.

>>Benj: Awesome, awesome. So beautiful, so beautiful. Yeah, because I mean, why would I make fun of myself? If I'm the one face I can't see, then all the other faces show me who I am, so why would I make fun of myself? It doesn't make any sense.

>>Rick: And if we're really all the same self, ultimately, just expressing itself or shining through different lenses, then who is making fun of whom?

>>Benj: That's right. The heart matters, I think. It really matters, just to live to live from the heart. And it's not always glamorous; sometimes it's cloaked. Kindness and patience and quietness - it's not flashy to be kind to people, it's ordinary. A smile goes a *long* way.

And beautifully too, in that mirror-neuron way, where the brains are firing whatever they're seeing, and in some percentage. Like when I smile, some part of you actually smiles, on the inside, underneath the emotion of whatever is going on, and when you do it, the same over here. How amazing to walk down the street and just throw smiles at people? Not that they need them, not for any kind of "agenda" way, but literally because it happens – like smile-smile, smile-smile, smile-smile.

I was in Sweden and I was holding the sign. And this man came up to me and he was like, "F\$#@ you, mother##@\$\$, f you, f you..." and he was in my face! And he was like, "I wanna f@\$'in kill you ..." and I was just like, "Hallelujah (Benj is singing it), hallelujah..."

>>Rick: You were singing?

>>Benj: "Hallelujah, halleloo-oo oo oo- oo oo jah," and I just kept singing as he was saying that. And it one point he was just stopped. And he saw ... I say him stop. I saw whatever that was stop and he said, "Wow, thank you so much," and I said, "Oh, I love you."

>>Rick: Wow!

>>Benj: And he walked away.

>>Rick: Very cool.

>>Benj: Yeah, and it's that moment of being willing to love in the face of what looks terrifying and find out if it really is terrifying. And obviously there are moments where that's not going to work, but I think we all have the courage and we all have the bravery to see what love can actually do.

>>Rick: That's beautiful. It's kind of like "turn the other cheek," as Christ put it, you know?

>>Benj: Yeah, which is fun, because my friend in New York - Christie, she's great - and she said that in her tradition, I think it's the Greek Orthodox tradition or the Eastern Orthodox tradition, "turn the other cheek" means, "try it again, sucker." So that's a fun take on that.

We usually think "turn the other cheek" as in "hit me again," but it's more like, "see if you can get away with that again." And I love that interpretation, it kind of opens the gates. Because Christ sat down and fashioned a whip. We have to remember that the Prince of Peace, if we're going to play with this metaphor ...

>>Rick: To go to the moneychangers?

>>Benj: He sat down and He *made* a weapon. So it's useful in this conversation of Christ being a model, to remember that even He has moments of anger and weakness.

>>Rick: And if it was even weakness, I mean, if we look to the Vedic tradition and the Gita, Arjuna sat down in his chariot and said, "I don't want to fight these guys; these are my relatives." And Krishna, who was supposedly the Incarnation of God said, "No, you *have* to. So get over it, realize that I've already killed them – reality - and do your dharma, do your duty."

I mean World War II, we wouldn't have just said, "Ahhh, Hitler, whatever, we'll just turn the other cheek and maybe he'll go away;" we had to get in there and do something about it.

>>Benj: Well there are always *ways* to do something about it, I think, that are broader than the either-or of, "I either am in Gandhi's way" – like totally passive, or I'm obviously an actual aggressor. And I don't think there's *ever* a reason for violence; there's got to be other ways. And I personally am, right now in my life, playing with how else can we address the concern of violence.

Because human-to-human violence is the saddest problem on earth. Because disease – okay, we got disease, we deal with that, natural disasters – sure, we can do our best with those, but the fact that we attack each other, that's just so sad. And I know I've done it and I'm not immune to it myself, but there's something, as in my experience right now, that's just like ... is there any way that we can stop doing that?

And I think through sharing like this and remembering, “Wow, we are connected, and we are connected. Why would I hurt myself?” I don’t have hope that oh, eventually it will all end, but it seems that we really can do stuff. And with information technology now we can get to each other a lot faster with a lot of our ideas and a lot of our stories that are inspiring, so it does seem that in some ways that works, but I don’t know.

>>Rick: Yeah, I guess it was again Gandhi, whom you just mentioned, who said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and eventually we’ll all be blind and toothless.” I guess. I don’t know, I mean, this is getting off into speculation and opinion and I’m certainly not advocating violence myself ...

>>Benj: What else is there?

>>Rick: It’s not my tendency, but it almost – to play devil’s advocate – it almost seems like there are certain circumstances where you sort of have to stand up to an aggressor in an aggressive way, because he’s just not going to go with subtlety. He’s not just going to say, “Okay, you seem like a nice guy, I guess I’ll just give up this endeavor and go back to my little country;” some people are just wired up as such.

>>Benj: Yeah, I hear you, I hear you. I mean, there’s a sword and there’s a net. I think there’s a way to have net strategies, which is to isolate it so it’s only left with itself, as opposed to destroying it. And *Doing Time, Doing Vipassana*, is a beautiful documentary about meditation within a prison and how the prisoners had a great transformation – they’re hugging the guards when they come out ... so there are these ways we can kind of “net” something and then seemingly love it to the degree that it releases its own aggression, but I know that these are speculative strategies.

>>Rick: Yeah. I hope we haven’t bored people with this tangent we’ve gone off on, but it’s kind of interesting to just let it go where it goes and see what we uncover; we talk about the same stuff every week.

Let’s talk a little bit about ... I love this heart-orientation thing that you’ve been talking about. It’s like settling down from your head to your heart and tuning into that, and acting from there, let’s talk about that whole thing a little bit more.

>>Benj: The importance to me of love is that it is so obvious that it’s necessary. When I’m out in the world, even now, kindness ... kindness resonates. Like enthusiasm, it’s like enthusiasm, “Wow!” and it resonates, and kindness has that same resonance. And there are so many old paradigms, not to get too philosophical, but there are so many old strategies that aren’t working anymore.

There are more of us, and kindness and being good to each other and being compassionate to each other and helping each other out is going to be such a useful strategy for solving some of the strategies that the sheer number of us is going to create as time goes on. There are just more and more and more people, and the earth has, not necessarily *unlimited* resources, but it has some limits and we’re going to hit those limits, obviously. The sharing and the kindness – that story of the kids holding hands, I mean it really comes down to that ... being willing to notice that we’re all here together.

So maybe I can *have* a little less, I can simplify my life to have a little less, so that when things come my way I can give them a little more, that's what I find happens here. And not that this is about right or wrong or should or shouldn't, just what *feels* the best?

If I wake up every day and I go and I do only what I want to do, which I've done before and I think there's something valuable to that, at some point it's like, "Okay, well what else?" **The next greatest feeling, selfishly, I can find is to share with others and to be kind with others.** So I think there's a way that altruism can get forced, like, "You need to be good to other people," to the point where you don't even learn what you like or how you like to be.

So it seems like selfishness is useful, but if selfishness is taken all the way through it's going to lead to, "Oh wow, we're all here!" and then the best feeling I can find, selfishly, is to love and to care about other people. And so that feels useful, especially, seemingly, with the coming challenges of resources, which may or may *not* happen. I mean, this is the thing that is so fun; I can only speculate from what I know and I don't know everything.

>>**Rick:** That's an interesting point – the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. **It may seem altruistic but it actually *is* self-serving,** in a way. Like we were saying before, the knife that's sharp on both ends, or if you're mean to somebody it makes you feel bad, it's like you're the prime beneficiary when you are helping others. That's not maybe your motivation, but that's the outcome, that's the natural result.

It's like a teacher. He teaches a classroom – you've been a teacher in classrooms – and who learns the most? It's actually the teacher who is learning the most! The students are learning but he is the primary beneficiary.

>>**Benj:** He's listening; if he's listening to the students then he's learning a lot. Yeah, I love that. There are those moments in teaching where it's like, "Wow, we're *all* learning together." Being able to say, "I don't know, I'll look that up and get back to you," like, "Hey, let's look that up together."

There are those great moments where... and this is something that happens in the spiritual conversations too, the hierarchy can actually be just equalized. You know, we're all here together. The guy in the chair, the girl in the chair, **the one who is awakened – equal, equally decaying, equally experiencing the air, as the people sitting below and trying to learn** about that experience.

And so it seems so important for *me*, to try and make sure that that equality is emphasized because anything else just feels like bulls#\$@, because we're all here together. **It does not matter who has had what experience, we are all here together. And that feels very important to say.**

>>**Rick:** Yeah, I agree. Again, it's a 'both-and' situation where, like if I go to see the Chicago Bulls play basketball, **in some respect I'm equal to the players but I'm not an equal basketball player.** So, **the guy in the chair may be more eloquent, better able to articulate and so on, but what he's attempting to articulate is that which everyone is completely immersed in anyway.** Maybe he has a little more clarity about it, but we're all fish swimming in the same ocean.

>>Benj: Yeah, I see that, it comes down to the setup. I like that you bring up the ball game because in the realm of competition, yes, you're not going to get a jersey, but in the realm of playing together and reducing that need to compete, well then why can't we all just throw the ball around together and have fun?

So it seems there's a time and a place for all of that. Competition is a very funny thing, especially when it comes to sports because everything has to be agreed upon in order for the game to happen. I mean, we cooperate on every single rule and then we go, "Okay, I won," even though we're cooperating the *entire* time. We could go, "Out of bounds..." – it's totally made-up theater, and then we pretend to compete.

And it's a big business and it has its fun and I love watching it. Right now the Final Four – I think it's on today and it's like, "Okay, cool," it's part of the fun. But it's also a little bit of a silliness, this idea that somebody can actually win something, when we're cooperating the entire time. And in some ways that's sort of like satsang: you don't "win" enlightenment, you don't "win" awakening; we're cooperating the entire time, we're agreeing that such a thing is possible.

You know, this satsang is such a setup because everybody walks in and it's already decided what this experience is, like, "We're all doing this." But, "Okay, what if we just sit down and hang out together as equals and *not* talk about satsang and just share our day?" And you hear that sometimes, in the sharings I do, it's like that dance between group therapy and community organization, and then seemingly some spiritual conversation.

But it really comes down to: what are we trying to create here? We are all creating it together. You can easily walk into a satsang and bring checkers, like, there are no rules, there are no rules; we're really playing and creating this together, over and over and over again. So I think the thing that's useful is: am I aware that I'm doing that? Because then when I walk in, I'll walk in without my setups and see, "Well what *actually* is going on? Let's look at this from a different angle."

When someone goes into a group and seemingly there is somebody who has had some kind of experience, or as you said, that eloquence, [to ask myself] "Okay, how else can I see this?"

There was this great picture one time of people in an Iranian mental hospital and then there was a picture of people in a temple, praying. And if you put them next to each other, there's no way to tell the difference between what they're doing. And I think that's really it! If everyone was giving a satsang in a mental hospital and you were videotaping it, is that going to be taken as seriously as if you did it at the Hyatt? It's the setup of the whole thing that creates the context for what we think is happening.

And I think that's very useful to play with because I think in that both-and way, like wait, what *else* could this be? What else could this be! Maybe there's no awakening, maybe it's just a bunch of theater going on ... like, what else could this be? That seems to be a very useful thing to ask. I notice in my life, all the time, that I'm able to see something a little bit differently when I ask that, because it unpacks the learning and the conditioning and the social ideas of what this is and what is going on. Because if I just "believe," if I just believe without playing, then I can easily get caught up in chasing after somebody else's idea.

>>Rick: Whenever I ponder any of this stuff, like listening to you for the last couple of minutes, I just find my awareness kind of swinging through a whole *range* of possibilities. And I find myself accepting of what's being said but being reminded of the infomercials where they say, "But wait, there's more."

>>Benj: Yeah, totally.

>>Rick: Because it's like, "Yes, this, but also this." It's almost like that thing in physics where the light thing is not a particle or a wave until the observer observes it and focuses ... Schrödinger's experiment, or one of those guys. But it's almost like, when we have to say something about anything, we congeal it down into one of a myriad of possibilities...

>>Benj: That's exactly what I mean.

>>Rick: Just because of the mechanics of human understanding and speech and so on. And if we could do that and simultaneously, at least in the background, keep an appreciation of the vast myriad of possibilities that we're *not* expressing at this moment, that's kind of cool.

>>Benj: Umm, for sure, I agree with you, like, "Wait, there's more." And that's just it, it's how else can I look at this and play with it? And what's beautiful is, as you were saying, it's all about an understanding, well what *isn't* an understanding?

>>Rick: Hmm, yeah, I've actually had people accuse me of being wishy-washy because I seem to agree with all my guests even though they're all saying slightly different things. They think I'm being conciliatory or something, like, "Why don't you take a stand? Why don't you try to change their...?"

>>Benj: Well we can do that.

>>Rick: Nah, I wouldn't want to.

>>Benj: I'm just saying, we can play ...

>>Rick: We're all blind men feeling the elephant - it *is* a wall, it *is* a trunk, it *is* a snake, it's all those things, depending on which part you happen to be feeling at the moment.

>>Benj: Well that's a fun comment, because in some ways tension is interesting. You know, we live in a world where, "Tension, tension..." – tension keeps us interested. Because of we're just sort of here, and we're playful, well that's everybody's experience - kind of that bland ordinariness. So it's like, let's create some tension.

But what's fun is that that's what keeps all the struggles going, that *need* for the tension. No, I can't just relax, because if I relax then everything is okay, and if everything is okay it's almost like I don't exist.

>>Rick: Well you know, it's the old both-and thing again; tension and relaxation simultaneously. It's like manifestation, specification, concretization, and the simultaneous opposite of all those is the way the universe works.

>>Benj: I don't know how the universe works.

>>Rick: It's specific, it's universal. It's concrete, it's abstract. It's material, it's non-material – both at once. And we're little embodiments of that.

>>Benj: And then sometimes ... no, I agree with you ... and then sometimes, if we can move away from the words then there's that immediacy. And you know, you meditate – there's that immediacy of awareness or the immediacy of being; it's not a word, it's this.

And so it feels like that's what's so great about ... as the conversation feels interesting, there's something even more interesting, unfortunately it's not entertaining - even though it's amazing - because it's such a private thing. And in an interview it's called "dead air" – we're not just going to be quiet together because that's not necessarily ... but we could. That's the thing, because the conversation that we're having is really about {Benjamin goes silent ... to make the point}.

>>Rick: Yeah.

>>Benj: {continues being silent}.

>>Rick: I did that in the Mariana Kaplan interview a month ago. I made a point and she said, "Let's just be quiet for a minute and let that sink in," and we just sat there for a little while. Obviously if we did that the whole time nobody would watch these, because they can go do that by themselves.

>>Benj: Well ... I want to say ... there's something about seeing people being at ease that *is* interesting to watch. I don't know, I get this feedback: there are moments in my videos where there's quiet and many people are like, "That's the best part!" And so that might be true here, there's nothing wrong with silence.

The constant *need* to have the *mind* be involved, or the language be involved – there's no right or wrong to it, but it is nice when we rest because that is what we want, right, to rest? To just be a little relaxed for a second.

>>Rick: And do you find – sorry to violate the rest ...

>>Benj: Oh no, no, no, you can't screw it up.

>>Rick: Well because you know, I'm wired. Do you find that in your life in general – not necessarily even right now but *all* the time – that there's a simultaneous relaxation and I don't want to use the word 'tension,' but in the midst of your most dynamic situations ... let's say you are late for a flight, you're running through an airport and you're trying to get to the other gate. Don't you notice – and I don't want to put words in your mouth – but that there's a sort of an ease and relaxation and a silence in the midst of the chaos of the airport and the urgency to catch the connection, and so on? That the two can coexist paradoxically?

>>Benj: I don't know because I think that takes ... I mean, yes, I can see that in theory. The moment ... the moment is happening like this, and the words are falling out and we're playing, and I don't know what I'm going to say next, I don't even really know how this is working. And so can we stop right here

and even find that in the immediacy of the experience? I can find it in the “after the fact,” but in the immediacy, I don’t know.

>>Rick: it’s not necessarily there? Okay.

>>Benj: And that’s the thing where it’s like, **silence is in motion; silence is having the conversation** - in a poetic way - or the universe is having the conversation, or Nothing is having a conversation, pretending to be everything. Like that’s still kind of this philosophical perspective, and that’s what it seems like; it’s just happening in that way.

But when I was in the airport, I was just in the airport and I was *late*; I was like tick-tick-tick-tick-tick. And I was that guy who was like 50 people back and I was like, “I’ve got to catch a flight, can I cut in front of all of you?” And it was like, “Sure!” And it was like, “Okay, thank you.” It’s great to be that person and hit that sort of social weirdness ... like, we’ll just play and see what happens.

>>Rick: Do you find that it’s almost as though over time you’re becoming a kinder person? We’ve mentioned kindness, but are you plumbing the depths of deeper and deeper kindness?

>>Benj: Well I don’t know because that gets into that “there’s always more to learn,” but I definitely notice that it’s easier for me to ... you know, I don’t have much money and I notice it’s easier for me to when it comes my way to give it to somebody else who really needs it.

I just had a wonderful conversation with this man on Skype yesterday – I talk with people and he was like, “I’d like to make a donation,” and I said, “Well whatever amount you’re going to give me, just break it up into \$5 bills and go out onto the street and give it to somebody who really needs it, and look them in the eyes and say, “I love you.””

And that felt like the most amazing way that he could give me was to just go out into the world and learn how wonderful it is to give to other people. There’s a reality, I do need money, **but right now I have as much as I need** and so it’s not a big deal.

>>Rick: That’s sweet.

>>Benj: Well it’s important, because **the minute I’m making money off of people’s suffering and I’m keeping that going**, for me personally - and I know that everyone has a different view on this - but **for me personally, I am absolutely out of integrity**. You know, I cannot simultaneously talk about freedom and then not be willing to just have nothing, like what do I know then? **What do I know if I’m not willing to give up everything I own and be available to everyone?**

And this is again, this is my perspective and so I know it’s extreme.

>Rick: Yeah, and it is a perspective, I mean, everybody gets paid for their work, usually, in our society, and some people get paid, I think, way out of proportion with what they’re actually contributing, and others way under proportion to what they’re actually contributing – like teachers should get paid a lot more.

Nonetheless, if they *didn't* get paid, they wouldn't be able to do what they're doing, in many cases. And in your case, let's say, if you didn't have *any* money whatsoever, you'd probably have to get a job and then you wouldn't be able to do all day, which is helpful to people and not that many people are doing. So there's nothing ... you shouldn't feel guilty about getting some kind of financial remuneration if it's offered in the right spirit.

>>**Benj**: Yeah, I agree. I don't feel any guilt with that because I ask for money when I need it, but I also notice that there are so many different ways to share, and having a job and going to a job is one of those ways.

It just feels like ... if the thing I'm focusing on the most is love rather than some sort of sense of "my freedom," then that can happen at the grocery store, that can happen at the office, that can happen at the Department of Public Works or driving around in a truck – you know I've had different jobs, and I expect to have a job again. I can't do this ... I don't see myself doing this forever because it's important to stop "being" this guy and go into the world, and then be in the world in that way.

But for now there's this sort of window where I seem to do this, and I don't see myself doing it long-term. It's what I love about being on the street - I can give up all the stuff that happens on the internet, I can give up the meetings and go have a job, and then for a little bit of time every day I can go out on the street and do the same thing I do now.

This is about living an ongoing authentic life; it's not really about trying to get away with anything, which sometimes it feels that way, I feel like, "Wow! Really? I feel so lucky. I get to go around the world and talk with people," and it just feels like I want to make sure that I'm honoring the reality of that fortunate experience, which I try to do but I think I can always do better.

>>**Rick**: Do people actually pay your way to go flying here or there to talk to them?

>>**Benj**: Yeah. I do this thing where I live with people for a week. I went to Europe for two months, Australia and New Zealand, and then around America. So they just have to pay for the flight and I *happily* do chores and help out, you know, it's not like I just land in the corner. I try to be involved and just *live* with them, you know, I love that.

A satsang, in some ways, the meetings are their own little thing, but living with each other for an entire week – poopin' and sh#@'in and eating, and helping out with the cat and the kids, and all the normal realities, I think all of those things are important to share together, because that's what life actually is. We don't live in a room with a bunch of chairs, talking to each other about freedom; we have to go home and clean our garage, and take care of our business. So it's like, well let's live inside the business together.

And I feel so honored for everyone who's ever let me in their house, I just feel so honored for all the things I've gotten to learn from them.

>>**Rick**: That's nice, that's cool. I kind of did that myself for many years when I was teaching. I didn't actually own a home or rent an apartment for a period of about 15 or 20 years; I was just traveling, living out of a suitcase, going here and there.

>>**Benj**: Did you like it?

>>**Rick**: Yeah, I loved it. It was a great phase of my life, it was like ... you just got very emotional saying that, didn't you Ben?

>>**Benj**: (crying) Oh man, people are so amazing to me.

>>**Rick**: It's very sweet.

>>**Benj**: Ah, we're all so amazing, we're just doing our best. Yeah, it's like my heart is teaching me all kinds of things right now.

>>**Rick**: Hmm, do you do a spiritual practice of any sort formally anymore, like some kind of Za-Zen thing or are you just basically living life and it's unfolding of its own?

>>**Benj**: I still sit when I feel it, I don't necessarily have a schedule. But I definitely notice that I sit down sometimes and just be in that still point.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, in some of your videos you were saying that it's valuable to spend some time in silence.

>>**Benj**: Well it in the end it's that funny balance between that this is about a private experience and it's about a universal experience, as you said ... I like that word. And so when I'm there on the cushion just looking at the wall, being in that place, that's sort of gathering the energy to then go out and share some of that.

I like what Suzuki Roshi says. Someone asked him once, "So there's nothing we have to do." And he goes, "No, and that's why you must sit." And I really love that, that sort of okay, there's nothing to do; let's make the nothing even more and more and more and more, so that it's alive with love and it's alive with caring and compassion.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, there's the analogy of if you want to shoot an arrow, first you have to pull it back on the bow then let go, you don't just hold it there and let go of it. And that is like how deeper silence gives rise to greater – to the opposite stroke – dynamism.

>>**Benj**: Yeah. It's the importance of doing what we *feel* we have to do, doing what we feel we *must* do, doing the *right* thing. It comes back to just, "How can I be a good person?" I can spend hours in the 'there's nobody here' conversation and that has its own value in releasing certain patterns from conditioning, but then okay, cool, how can I be kind? How can I help? How can I share?

And I notice that if there's any point I want to make, this is the point, which is that: keep coming back to the honesty and the very practical, pragmatic reality of living together and caring for each other.

>>Rick: That's great. I mean it's unfortunate, but in some cases, many of the teachers who have banged the drum of 'nobody here' most loudly have ended up getting caught in circumstances which did not exactly display compassion and caring – all kinds of funny things with money and sex and various difficulties.

I think there's a growing appreciation in the satsang community or the spiritual community that you have to ... that the 'nobody here' thing can be a cop-out for not taking care of your humanness and your decency as a person, that there could be a good deal work yet to be done in that arena.

>>Benj: I think those moments are really wonderful for the communities because it highlights that the minute we set someone up in a hierarchical authority position, it just highlights the awkwardness and the inefficiency of that. If we stay at equality then it's like, "Oh yeah, yeah, you had a little adultery or you had a little problem with money, okay, that happens here," but when we are like, "They *know* something," I think that sets up this weird imbalance. Because everyone is here together, even the people who make seemingly those errors of judgement or whatever, they're innocent; they're just believing their thoughts like the rest of us.

So it is just so sweet that the gurus and the teachers who have had those experiences, if I take away the belief that they're anything special, well then of course they're just here, they're just like mom and dad and uncle Steve, and like everybody who has their own problems and their own challenges in life.

Plato has this great quote, he says, "Be kind, for everyone you see is fighting a great battle," and that includes the spiritual teacher. You know, they're fighting the battle of fame or admiration or that sort of personal social payoff from being touted as somebody who has something; that's a *powerful* struggle. And some people handle that very well, and some people handle it in a way that's awkward for them.

So for everyone to remember: no matter who it is, that great battle is always going on, no matter who it is.

>>Rick: Yeah, like you said a while ago, everybody is doing the best they can.

>>Benj: Definitely, including the people ... it's that innocence of humanity, you know, we're totally innocent. It's just thoughts, we're just believing thoughts. And some moments one thought believed leads to a big-a@@ problem, like the one on Wall Street, and another thought believed leads to feeding somebody a sandwich or making cupcakes for a party.

So everyone is doing the same thing, and that's where the hierarchy ... it feels very useful to keep pointing out that it's not helpful, ultimately, for seekers to "hold up" anyone, because what really works here is this sense that we're all here together and we're all equal – in our humanity, in our suffering. I mean, suffering does bind us in that way, that challenge binds us.

Even if someone says they're beyond suffering, it's like, "Okay, let me watch..." Alex Trebek has this great quote where he says, "Don't tell me what you believe; I'll watch your life and I'll decide for myself." And I think there's something to that, really, like the integrity of that. Not taking people at their word and just observing them, because I can say anything – you gotta watch, you gotta watch, you gotta

watch. That's what I love about living with people for a week, it's like it's pretty hard to be full of sh#@ if you see each other all day.

>>Rick: Yeah, I think it says in the Bible, "You shall know them by their fruit." And then Ram Dass said, "if you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your parents."

>>Benj: Yeah, totally. And I don't find any value to thinking I'm enlightened, I don't find any value in thinking *anyone* is enlightened. There's no reason for that; just being a good person is enough.

>>Rick: Yeah, yeah. My wife talks about this sort of thing a lot too. She feels very strongly that ... like the Alex Trebek quote, she wants to see the proof of the pudding and not just any self-proclaimed, subjective state or anything like that. If it's real – what you're saying – then it needs to percolate down into the nitty-gritty, and if it *doesn't* then maybe there is some integration yet to be accomplished.

>>Benj: Sure, and I think that opens up "what is the 'it'?" Is there something different than just being good people together and dealing with our own battles? Like, does somebody ever have something that is really "it"? You know, this again is part of the theater, and I know what she's pointing to, I'm sure, but it is still kind of fun ... how much of the setup is being taken seriously?

>>Rick: Well, I think there is an "it" though, I mean, when you had that experience on the balcony wherever it was, there was a subjective shift. If someone was watching you at that moment, nothing would have changed in your circumstances - you're standing on the balcony, stars are shining and so on, but somehow, your subjective perspective changed and as you said, it never shifted back.

So somebody like Christ for instance, to take an extreme example, He wasn't just a cool guy going around raising people from the dead and all, there was something in His subjective development. Enlightenment, if we want to use that word - it has so much baggage, but if we want to use it – if you the average person, I'll play devil's advocate with it here, if the average person...

>>Benj: Which is all of us.

>>Rick: Which is all of us.

>>Benj: The average person is all of us.

>>Rick: If the average guy on the street were to suddenly somehow magically pop into seeing the world as Ramana Maharishi saw it or as Christ saw it; I think there would be a *dramatic* contrast. And that's what this whole spiritual game is about, it's not just the symptoms in terms of kindness and good feelings and nice behavior and all that, not to demean those – those are very important, but really the whole thing is about a subjective development, a shift in our internal realization. Words are difficult to capture it but would you agree or not?

>>Benj: I agree to the idea of it, and then when it comes down to it, we don't actually know. I don't know what anyone else actually experiences. I can see the outside, I can watch you and I can see that, but when it comes to this idea of a shift – and this is the other thing - I don't find it very useful to *believe*

that at all, because in the end it's "here we are" and I have to do my best. And I can believe that Ramana had something different than the guy at the gas station or that the Dalai Lama is experiencing something different than the guy on the Bull's team, but I don't know what the *value* of that is. And I'm still open to exploring it, I hear the point you're making, but **I really don't understand the value of comparing other people's experiences because in the end, this is the one that I'm living with** and everything I can touch and experience and influence is right here.

>>**Rick**: Well it's not to compare for the sake of saying that Ramana Maharishi was *better* than the guy at the gas station or anything like that, and I think we can talk about this without implying some sort of "holier than thou" or superior-inferior hierarchy, but **the whole history of spirituality, I'm just saying, is not just about good works and being a nice person** and stuff. Although that's part of it and in many cases that's referred to **both as a *symptom* of spiritual development and as a *technique* to facilitate it** – if you do good stuff it helps to culture your ... make you more worthy or susceptible to spiritual awakening.

But there is this subjective component that has traditionally always been part of it, which can be very, very profound and can actually serve the purpose of just what you're saying. It's like we were saying ... well take an example, a guy who can't swim, if somebody is drowning, he can't help him very much, but if he **learns to become a good swimmer then he can become a lifeguard. So if there is a profound inner realization, maybe that can have a utilitarian purpose, maybe it can enable a person ... that can be contagious.**

And as it spreads, contagiously, it's going to enhance the lives of many people, making them better not only in terms of their inner happiness – I mean, I've heard you give whole videos about that happiness is to be found within and not just in external experiences – so enhancing not only that, but **enhancing their ability to ... the likelihood of their helping the guy on the street** who is having a hard time, or volunteering at the soup kitchen, or doing something on a *practical* level to benefit humanity

>>**Benj**: Yeah, I hear that and I notice that there are lots of people ... and I agree, I just am very skeptical with subjective ... like reports of experiences, it doesn't help to *believe* that because...

>>**Rick**: I'm not saying that.

>>**Benj**: I know that's not what you're saying and I agree that there is something that can happen and it can have an effect out in the world, yet I have a feeling that single mothers right now and elderly people all over the world ... all of that is *already* happening. There are people who are simply living a good life, kindly, not believing too much of the noise that they learned from school, society, church; they are all over the world.

And then there's this conversation about a special one of those and I think that's the thing that kind of keeps it from, "Oh wow, everybody is like this." Everybody has this exact same potential and experience of sharing what matters to them and what they value and what they care about.

>>**Rick**: Well the whole name of this show, *Buddha at the Gas Pump*, implies that in the most ordinary of circumstances you're going to encounter so-called "awakened" people these days, and the subtitle of

this show is “Interviews with ordinary spiritually awakened people,” so I’m hip to your whole thing of what you’re trying to say here. I’m just playing the both-and card and saying that you don’t have to exclude the significance of the subjective development, while emphasizing the value of caring and sharing and helping and all that stuff; the two can go hand in hand and in fact, they complement one another.

>>**Benj**: Yeah. I see that.

>>**Rick**: And again, you know, it’s not a matter of believing it because that’s not going to do you any good.

>>**Benj**: No, I know, because that’s my point, that’s all my point is...

>>**Rick**: It doesn’t matter what your belief...

>>**Benj**: ... Ramana Maharishi having a special experience, it doesn’t matter what anybody...

>>**Rick**: Yeah, it’s like looking at a restaurant and saying, “I believe and I’ve heard that they have *really* good food in there.” You could starve to death sitting on the sidewalk doing that; you have to actually eat the food. And so that’s what it’s all about, definitely, having the experience yourself like the restaurant example.

Ramana Maharishi didn’t want people to *believe* that he was having some cool experience level of life; he wanted them to experience it just as he experienced it, or as Christ said, “Whatsoever great things I do, even greater things shall you do.” So all these guys, if they’re genuine and if they have integrity as we started out this interview talking about, they’re not just trying to ...

Well I can see why you would feel this, because religion has, to a great extent, devolved into the whole emphasis is on believing stuff that you don’t necessarily experience.

>>**Benj**: *And* gathering notes from people you don’t actually get to live with. I don’t know *anything* about Ramana Maharishi, I don’t know anything about anyone who is dead; all I know is words about their lives. I want to see, I want to spend time with *you*, I want to spend time with the people that are alive today, I want to be out in the world with people who I can actually touch and breathe next to and feel. Because everyone who is dead, all they’ve left behind are pictures and letters, and I don’t know how that helps anyone.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, as somebody said, “Dead gurus don’t kick ass.”

>>**Benj**: They grow flowers though.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, anyways, I think everybody gets the point and I think we’re *basically* in agreement. Doesn’t matter whether we are on not...

>>**Benj**: Sure, the important thing for me is that I can’t see the value – and I’m only speaking for myself – I don’t see the value in believing that anyone is having a special experience.

>>Rick: No, I don't see the value of that either any more than ... except perhaps in a theoretical way, the way science works: you take a theory and you don't really *believe* in the theory, it's just a theory, and you're going to *test* to see whether it's valid or not. So you do all these experiments and you see how it turns out.

It may turn out one way or it might turn out the opposite way, you're not supposed to have a vested interest, if you're really a scientist. So all this talk of higher states and enlightened states, it's an interesting theory.

>>Benj: Totally!

>>Rick: And if you want to investigate it, fine, do some experiments or whatever, however you choose to do them, and you'll end up finding out whether it's true or not.

>>Benj: Yes, and that's the key, is I have to actually do the experiments. I have to do them, I have to be willing. Whatever it is I'm trying to find, I have to be willing to shut the f#\$ up and sit down and get quiet, and find out if there's anything here that is really, really scary or terrifying or I have to run from.

Because I can *believe*, I can add letters upon letters upon letters, and in the end, what I really want is to be able to *sit* in the world as I am, without any fear. That's what anybody wants, it seems like the only thing anybody wants, is to be able to actually relax in their life. Well that cannot be found in letters and piles and piles of letters; I can only do that if I get quiet and I sit still.

And I wade through, and it could be terrifying and it could be scary and it could be maddening. I wade through *all* of the beliefs of yesterday that I think are still happening. And then I land here in the chair and there's no yesterday to be found. There's just this amazing tingling aliveness ... that I know nothing about.

I have to be willing to give up the conversation [in order] to find out what's being talked about. {about a one minute period of silence}.

>>Rick: Ha, I just got a warning on my computer, it says: "Warning. There's no volume. You're mic might not be working." ☺

>>Benj: Right, even the computer is scared of silence.

>>Rick: Yeah!

>>Benj: Oh, there's nothing to fear.

>>Rick: Yeah, that was good.

>>Benj: No, thank you. I appreciate, I appreciate that you gave a little space for that, because it really is the meat of the whole conversation, is the opposite of talking about it.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, and I think I really understand what you're saying now. All the talk and all the words and all that, it's just sort of surface chatter, and it's only value, if any, is to point to something, is to point to the real thing, which is far beyond the level of chatter.

>>**Benj:** Well yeah ... yes, yes, I agree. Language is a wonderful tool but is inefficient for *one* thing, and that is describing what this is.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, as Adyashanti always says, "I do the best I can, I know I'm going to fail, I just try my best to fail well."

>>**Benj:** Ha! Yeah.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, he does a good job of failing well.

>>**Benj:** His notes have been very helpful for me with regards to the body stuff {Benjamin is quoting Adyashanti here, saying}: "... certain body conditions change because motivations are lost; I was an athlete and I don't care anymore."

And so I remember encountering him, I was in London at a friend's house and just opened one of his books and there was this page about just being willing to trust that the body will breakdown and change in its own accord. And that's the one thing from him that I found really valuable, I appreciated his notes on that.

And that's the beauty of the conversation like you were saying, it's good to share our notes – speculation is a little tricky – but what is actually happening with us, feels very useful to share, because everyone has a different thing.

I worked with these older men, they were in their 60s and they said, "Well, when you get to be my age you'll have a colonoscopy and it will be like this ..." and so I feel all prepped.

>>**Rick:** Hey, I'm in my 60s.

>>**Benj:** Hey, you know? I mean, there are certain things because of aging ... aging is the reality we have to deal with, so there are certain stages of aging that allow us to ... "Hey, this might come to you, this might come to you," and that feels very useful. And in this conversation of looking into the silent experience of ourselves some of our notes can be useful, mostly around fear ... fear and what happens with the body.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, and also I think ... I get a lot of feedback from people who listen to these interviews and they say it really helps them to hear this whole variety of different peoples' experiences because it enables them *not* to put people on a pedestal. I get feedback from people saying, "Holy mackerel! This is happening to average Joes like me, this is happening to everybody, and I feel so much more optimistic now about my possibilities and about my life."

>>Benj: Yeah, and that's the usefulness of it, is that the face looks different, or the tone is different, or even the personality expression is different, but what's being talked about is exactly the same. And hilariously, it's available the minute I'm willing to shut up.

>>Rick: Cool.

>>Benj: It's not profound and it's not necessarily entertaining, but it's available constantly, for anyone, at any moment. It's the opposite of trying to figure out what this is.

>>Rick: Yeah. When you settle down like that though – you were talking about the body a minute ago – do you notice that there may be some agitation in the body some place? Some tension in the head or some kind of turbulence in the heart or whatever, and that your attention is naturally drawn to that and it helps to facilitate the dissolving of it?

>>Benj: Mm-hmm, definitely. I had a huge a huge knot in my stomach, it felt like an energetic knot in the middle of the night, whatever that means, and I just sort of ... just looking at it without trying to get rid of it or move towards or away, just look at it and it just softens on its own. Seemingly awareness, which we use that word for whatever attention is – attention is *fascinating* – it's got love in it, it's almost like permission to just be. And so when I put my awareness on whatever it is, it is just permission for it to be.

And I think that the whole idea that I have to improve or "fix" myself is the obstacle; I don't have to do that, I just have to see what's here. And in seeing what's here, it'll change on its own because change is the nature. 'Change' is just another word for 'energy' or 'nothing' or 'the universe.'

Do you find that with your experience?

>>Rick: Absolutely. I'm a long-time meditation practitioner and for me, meditation is like a CAT scan, where you just sit, letting yourself be totally silent, and on the screen of that silence you naturally notice areas that need your loving attention, and the attention has a kind of healing quality to it. And over the course of an hour or whatever, things just dissolve and get worked out and there's greater freedom, greater depth that in a way gets stabilized, it gets made permanent by having kind of resolved whatever the thing you were carrying around with you for God knows how long.

>>Benj: Right, only God does know. Yeah, it's a very useful thing, being silent, as you know from your life experience. If I'm not willing to meditate, and I don't necessarily mean to look like the Buddha – you could sit on a park bench or relax... - if I'm not willing to be alone and be quiet, it's pretty hard ... I can't imagine discovering anything that's worth anything, because the one thing that's always here no matter what's going on *is* that quiet.

It's like the million dollars I'm looking for is buried in my heart. And it's so *amazing*, it's the most ... so *hilarious* how much seeking energy going outwards for what is being looked for being right here.

>>Rick: Yeah, right here, but if it is overlaid with layer after layer after layer of agitation, then it can be obscured. So this being quiet that you were referring to, is an opportunity for the agitation to settle down and allow that thing which is right here to be more evident.

>>Benj: Yeah, I agree.

>>Rick: And it does alter the physiology too, I mean, we live this through having a body; if we didn't have a body we wouldn't be having this conversation ... or living anything or holding signs in the street or anything else. So it's almost like we're fine-tuning our instrument, our living instrument, by doing this.

>>Benj: And the fun way to play with that in words even, is that I don't *have* a body because watch: who is to the body is talking here? The whole thing ... the 'body' is another word for the 'universe'. It's not that there's a "me" that *has* a body; there's 'the body.' And that's very beautiful, like, "Oh wow, there's another little apparent split that I don't have to keep entertaining. I am the body, fine." Leave it there and see what happens. That's what ... it's so relaxing.

Because I had that, I have had that you know, there's sort of this mind-body split, the Descartes split, and it's like, wait wait, hold on, what are we really ... where is *that*? Where is that really, if I don't play with the letters?

>>Rick: That's good, I'm glad you added that.

>>Benj: It's hard to find. These separations we can do in language are very difficult to find in the immediate experience.

>>Rick: Are you apolitical or do you find that your strong feelings about kindness and love and caring and all that tend to align you with certain political perspectives or movements, like Occupy Wall Street or any of those types of things?

>>Benj: I think it's useful, yes, there's a sort of pay-it-forward economy that feels useful to begin to talk about, as opposed to the "I have my stuff, you have yours." We love each other, and while trading is useful, sharing is also useful, so I notice there's some energy in there, in the Occupy way.

And then I'm a big fan of rights for all people who enjoy pleasure that is not necessarily heterosexual pleasure. It feels very crazy to me that the Bible still has influences in public policy, because that's a Book written 2,000 years ago by people who didn't know about the genes, genomes, germs, refrigeration, electricity, airplanes, the internet, sunglasses.

The fact that that Book continues to inform public policy feels *so* wrong and unfortunate for us and our world, because there are people every day who are being denied rights because somebody, somewhere believes there's an invisible Being that wrote a Book, and that that has to be taken seriously. Those people, I mean imagine 2,000 years ago if they knew about airplanes and the internet and modern medicine, is the *Bible* what they would come up with, *now*? I mean it just seems crazy to me.

And so anything that denies gay rights, transgender rights, bisexual rights, women's rights, children's rights, minority rights – all of those things – that *has* to be spoken out against because again, it's [about] working towards this equality.

>>**Rick**: Yeah. Did you ever see that letter to Dr. Laura that circulated around on the internet? It's really hilarious. It's like: "I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?" and all kinds of things ... "I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 *clearly* states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?"

>>**Benj**: The *metaphor* was useful when it was created, as a tool not only maybe of illumination but more likely as control. It is *not* useful now. We cannot have a president of the United States who does not admit that there's an invisible Being somewhere that's watching over people. That's *crazy* to me! Like why is that still something that is taken seriously?

And I understand it in the softer both-and side, where it's like, ideas are a momentum, they latch on, beliefs are powerful – how beliefs work in the physiology is almost *everything* - so I get why it's still happening, but we have to begin to talk out against it, not necessarily to start wars but just to be like, "Look, we're all here together." And that's where the love and the kindness and the equality, even to people who believe in the Bible, I'm not against *them*; I'm against their beliefs. I have to be because otherwise I'm allowing something that continues to create more and more violence and suffering and discomfort for my *friends*, for the people I care about in this world, who are *not* heterosexual, and who are not necessarily white men.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, well it's like what we were saying before about beliefs versus experience: if you hang your hat on a whole set of beliefs which are not necessarily *connected* with actual nitty-gritty experience in the world, in *this* world that we live in, then things can get very disjointed and crazy and unfair.

>>**Benj**: I agree. And I think that's one of the things about spirituality that's dangerous is it does create a sort of "anything goes" mentality, at least it can in the Nonduality circles. Anything doesn't go, you should not let injustices and violence just ... we seemingly can speak out against that in the most loving, peaceful, throwing-a-net-over-it way we can, but it's so important to begin to, or to continue – whoever it is who is listening - to continue to begin to, "Wait, what do I really care about, because I'm going to have to speak up against it?" Because all there are are animals with ideas using force, or not, on earth; that's all that's happening, it's animals and ideas using force, or not.

>>**Rick**: That thing you just said about in the Nonduality community that ... I forgot the way you phrased it but, what I think it is is the confusion of levels fallacy, where because on some level things are experienced and understood to be all nondual, it is sometimes extrapolated *from* that to assume that therefore we don't have to worry about this problem or concern ourselves with that situation at all, because there really is no one to worry or concern.

I mean, there's even one guy who is a well-known Nonduality teacher who told me that some guy called him up and said he wanted to have an affair. And he wanted to get a little reassurance ahead of time that there really was "no one" doing anything and therefore that would excuse his behavior and assuage his conscience.

>>Benj: Yeah, that happens. And that's a perfect expression of everything, trying to get information about whether or not it's okay to bum the neighbor. But still it's like, in that moment there is seemingly a responsibility toward honesty and kindness and mutual self-respect, and I think that that's sort of important.

And again, it's very easy to all of a sudden become moralizing and Fascist; I'm not speaking in a dictatorial way, but whatever I value I have to speak up against, I have to promote, I have to say, "Look, my friends who are gay are not evil. They have every right to exist, they have every right to equal rights." We have to speak out against that, just to make sure that the voices don't dim in the onslaught of ideas.

And this is what is so beautiful about the world! This is what is happening all over the world. I mean, all over the world there are just ideas competing for attention within brains, and then the brains live out the behavior of the idea. And so that's where the silence is useful, like, "Wait a minute – I want to get the opposite of an idea here for a second."

And then, can I use the energy of my life to promote love and kindness and what I value in a way that is really efficient? Because it does seem insane to me that certain ideas still run civil rights; it just doesn't make any sense.

>>Rick: Here's another one from that Dr. Laura letter: "A friend of mine feels that although eating shellfish is an abomination (Leviticus 11:10), it is a *lesser* abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?"

This whole letter was written to this woman who is a very conservative talk-show host and was railing against homosexuality and so on. A lot of very funny points in it, but in any case...

>>Benj: It's important, I think it's important for each person who is listening, myself included, to feel into "what do I really care about here? If there was going to be a world 500 years from now, what would I really want to work hard on so that people who experience, just like I do – sadness and joy and suffering, and happiness and sharing – what kind of world do I want to leave for them to encounter?"

Because we're all here, we're all here together and it's okay that people believe different things. And how effective are those beliefs in creating communities that really flourish and work and allow for the variances that happen within the human species? Because this is the world we live in, you know, the Bible is not true, and so we have to begin to live in a world where we acknowledge the reality of what is actually here, not what we *wish* was here but what is really here.

>>Rick: When you say the Bible is not true...

>>Benj: It's not true, it's not true, it's not an historical account of how the world actually works. I *will* not bend on this point and I'm happy to stop but it's not true. The Bible is not a valid source of what's going on in the universe.

>>Rick: I would say this, that's it's a snapshot, it's a perspective...

>>**Benj**: It's a poetry ... it's a poorly written piece of ....

>>**Rick**: Yeah, like anything else, it's not ... there's ... you can't find a black and white demarcation between truth and falsehood. It's like the yin-yang symbol – one side is white, the other side is black, and there's a white spot in the black side and a black spot in the white side; everything has elements in it, of value, even a pile of manure has tremendous value, in its own right.

>>**Benj**: Violence doesn't have value Rick.

>>**Rick**: *No*, but you know, it's relative, it's relative.

>>**Benj**: This is where this philosophical conversation gets dangerous. It's not relative, it's *not* relative. Violence does not have value, not in our world.

>>**Rick**: You know, I agree with you and I disagree with you.

>>**Benj**: I know, it's okay with that but I'm not going to back down because I cannot ... we *cannot* say in a philosophical way that everything is relative because that literally affects how we treat each other in this world.

>>**Rick**: Okay, so we go on a safari in Africa and we see lions committing violence against zebras...

>>**Benj**: We are not animals.

>>**Rick**: I thought you said we were animals. We're not animals?

>>**Benj**: We are not animals in that way Rick. We have a choice to love, we can choose to love. The modern conversation about "no free will" is going to turn us into *zombies*, if we're not careful. We have a choice to love and we wake up every day with that choice: I can either be afraid or I can love. A lion is following its conditioning...

>>**Rick**: Yeah, and it's doing what natural, totally natural ... for a lion. And its not that it hates the zebra...

>>**Benj**: No...

>>**Rick**: it just has to eat.

>>**Benj**: Of course not. And we're doing what's natural, and what's included in what's natural is the reality that we can choose to love, and that's important. It's important to not let that get washed over by philosophy, because that creates the world we live in where people are passing people every day on the street who need help.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, no, I really respect you for saying this and I think you have a very integrated, mature – if we want to call it "spirituality" – you have a very *mature* expression of spirituality, because I think spirituality really has to embrace and encompass all the kinds of value things you are talking about here, if it's really complete; it can't just be this sort of nondual, flat, detached thing or it's not really the whole enchilada.

But you know, I'm just so engrained with the notion that there is always a bit of the yin in the yang and vice versa, that I can't categorically state that under no circumstances, under no conditions ever, ever is violence completely wrong, because there might be a situation – your sister getting attacked by a rapist or whatever – there might be a situation in which it's appropriate. So as much as we abhor it on a philosophical or heart level or whatever, there might be circumstances in which it's called for.

>>Benj: I think there is always a possibility of a net, I agree. We might have to use force at times but there's always the *net*: the isolation of the threat as opposed to the destruction of it is always possible, when it comes to human beings.

>>Rick: Mm-hmm, well it's like that guy in Sweden or Denmark or wherever you were; that could have resulted in an altercation if you had bought into his energy – you know, the guy that was swearing at you and stuff? But instead, you overcame that energy with love and it diffused him.

>>Benj: There's a Lady Gaga quote that I love, she says, "I have to be willing to get kicked in the teeth for love," and I think that's it. It's not about proving anything like, "Look, I'm so willing to get kicked in the teeth..." – it's not about; it's about if I'm quietly going to live what I value, which is the kindness and compassion that comes from equality and connection, the *amazing* connection that this is, then I have to be willing to put my body on the line.

>>Rick: Mm-hmm. Did you ever see the movie *Gandhi*?

>>Benj: Mm-hmm, of course.

>>Rick: Remember that scene at the polls? They were coming wave after wave and getting beaten.

>>Benj: Yeah, yeah.

>>Rick: Well, it helps to prove your point. I mean, Gandhi managed to pull it off against the British in India, whether it can *always* apply, in *every* circumstance or not...

>>Benj: Sure, sure, sure, no, I agree. There are variances in contexts that are wide, but that doesn't mean that ... I can only aim for what I value. So my firmness is useful. I think we have these ideas that anger is negative, but there is healthy anger. There's anger that says, "I'm going to get a net and throw it over the rapist because I care about him *and* the people he's trying to affect." If I'm just kind all the time in that soft kind of farmer's market way, then I might miss out on the ability to set a nice, firm boundary for the sake of everybody.

You know, I love that I meet these young kids all the time that say, "Cops suck," and it's like really? Do you really want to live in a world without police? The very idea that there's a force out there that is utilized in a way to restrain and to protect, is really helpful, socially, because certain ideas come along that lead people to commit acts of violence.

And so it's important to value what we value and to *not* back down when it comes to love, and to not back down when it comes to equality, and to not back down when it comes to caring about each other

because we're literally creating the world. And I can argue away that, "Oh, eventually the sun will expand and the earth will be inside of it, so who needs to care about my notes?" But all of that is the way that I think philosophy disconnects us from the reality of our living experience, *and* from the reality that there are more people coming than just me, and that they too have the right to live in a world that is kind, and compassionate, and caring, and open to intelligent, creative exploration.

I mean, imagine 2,000 years ago if people had just given up on that, like, "Oh, it doesn't matter?" Imagine Nonduality landing in 500 A.D. ... "Oh, you know what, there's nothing here, who cares?" And then *boom* - nobody works, nobody tries, nobody efforts to create and continue to explore and solve the problems of disease and hunger and food and transportation.

We are so intelligent as an organism, and then we can philosophize away our responsibility to *all* of us. And I'm totally guilty of it, so this whole experience of my heart ... myself experiencing my heart is showing me how full of s#@/\$ I've been in certain ways. And I have to, I have to call myself on it. I'm not calling anyone else on it; I'm calling *myself* on it. My firmness is so that I remember not to get caught in philosophizing away the responsibility I have to my neighbors.

>>**Rick:** I totally agree and I'm glad you're stating it so emphatically, and I think there is too much of it in certain spiritual circles, sometimes Nondual circles. It's like this we were saying an hour ago, that level one doesn't negate level two or level three; that *all* the levels have their pertinence and their significance, and if you glom onto one to the exclusion of the others, you've got a lopsided spirituality.

You can be passionately concerned about the world and doing everything in your power to help it, while at the same time recognizing that everything is perfect just as it is, while at the same time recognizing that there *is* no world ... on some level.

>>**Benj:** I agree with you completely. I agree with you completely, because energy and creativity and inspiration come from all three of those together. And what happens, what is so easy to do is to forget the one where we're responsible for each other, and I think that that is the emphasis right now. I *learned* the other two – there's nothing going on, for sure, and "it's all one thing." Great, now how do I care? That's the new lesson for Benjamin is: how do I care? It's an ongoing, endless learning process.

>>**Rick:** Yeah, and from what I can tell, from this angle, you seem to be doing a good job of it. You're out on the street, you're thinking globally but acting locally, touching the lives of a great many people and through the internet touching an even broader circumference.

>>**Benj:** Yeah, you know, we'll see, we'll see. I can only do my best and like Adya says, I'm going to fail at it, and living from that place of making an effort and knowing that it doesn't save anyone.

>>**Rick:** You know, there's this saying about this old man and a boy who were walking on a beach and the tide was receding. And the beach was covered with starfish that had gotten stranded on the sand – you may have heard this story...

>>**Benj:** Mm-hmm, of course.

>>Rick: And they walk along and every now and then the old man reaches down and picks up a starfish and throws it in the ocean. They keep walking and he reaches down, picks up another one and throws it in the ocean. And the boy says, "What difference can you possibly make? There are *millions* of them." At that, the old man reaches down, picks up another one and throws it in the ocean and says, "Made a difference to that one."

>>Benj: That's *it*. It's those kids holding hands, trying to get that candy bar. It's that. And there can be a hopelessness in trying ... because obviously I can't save anybody, so that's the first thing – I can't save anyone. Because if I try to save people, there's that overwhelming hopelessness of going, "Holy s#@\$, there's too many of them. So it's first the maturity of, "Okay, I can't save anyone. Now, how can I offer some help, today, knowing full well that they're going to die?" It's that perfect marriage between nothing and everything.

How do I act knowing that ultimately the act doesn't mean anything, but in this moment, right here right now, it means everything? Because that balance, it just leads to kindness, it leads to a world we love to live in. Reduces the stress that comes from our ideas and beliefs about trying to control each other about be safe, be safe.

You know, we're so safe if we work together. We're not safe from disease and we're not safe from national disasters, but we're definitely safe from each other, if we work together.

>>Rick: Yeah.

>>Benj: I appreciate you taking ... I know I'm getting emphatic and I just appreciate your attention and your listening. I don't mean any aggressive disrespect, I just get very passionate about this point because it's so easy to overlook.

>>Rick: I can handle it dude.

>>Benj: Oh I know you can. There's a way that ... you know, I'm not enlightened, I'm not awakened; I'm just doing my best to try to be a good person and that's all that really matters.

>>Rick: Well you know, basically I agree with everything you're saying and it's just that whenever there's a little point of apparent disagreement, if we chew on it for a while, and we've done this several times during this interview, it kind of dissolves and we swallow it.

>>Benj: Yeah, no, I enjoy it, I just notice ... I think I notice that there's a way that I get emphatic that is slightly uncomfortable for me, so that's what I'm addressing.

>>Rick: *Yeah*, well we don't want to be wild-eyed fanatics but I think we don't want to be colorless saps either. A good deal of zeal and enthusiasm, I think, is a healthy thing, it's what kind of gets you off your butt and out there doing something.

>>Benj: Totally, yeah, for sure.

>>**Rick**: So I don't think there's anything wrong with it. I mean, I get quite incensed about some of the same points we've been discussing and related ones, like I get these emails from people that say, "Oh, there's no climate change," or whatever, because the *oil* companies are putting out a lot of propaganda money, trying to convince people that there's no climate change because they want to make a few bucks, a few ticks on the DOW, regardless of what happens to their grandchildren, and I get all steamed up about that sort of thing

>>**Benj**: Sure, great. And there really are injustices that come from a selfishness that doesn't include the other selves. There is a selfishness that includes the self and then there's a "*selfishness*," and so I think it's wonderful to speak out against those injustices. I don't want to go to war over them, but I want to be able to at least make sure that my voice doesn't dim.

>>**Rick**: Well going to war over them would be self-defeating.

>>**Benj**: Definitely.

>>**Rick**: And you know, maybe it is wishful thinking, but I *do* think that that whole mentality that we're speaking about here is on its way out, I really hope so. But there are signs, and even this global upsurge of awakening people and the egalitarian nature of it all over the world is, I think, symptomatic perhaps of a darker time having its day and the sun is rising.

>>**Benj**: Yeah, the egalitarian quality happens regardless of the conversation of awakening, and I think that's the benefit in some ways of making sure that the hierarchy in spirituality isn't taken too seriously. Because there are people every day all over the world that are not involved in this particular kind of conversation that are definitely promoting this exact same value.

>>**Rick**: Absolutely.

>>**Benj**: My point being that nobody *has* to awaken to share love and kindness and equality; it's already right here, available to all of us to share at any moment, whether or not we attend to have had a particular experience or not.

>>**Rick**: Oh yeah, after Mother Teresa died, they found her diaries and she was lamenting the fact that she felt like she didn't have any kind of inner experience. She felt like she was a total failure but here she was, one of the most compassionate people we've seen in our generation.

>>**Benj**: Not if you ask Christopher Hitchens, but for the moment part...

>>**Rick**: Ah, who cares?

>>**Benj**: I'm always fascinated by someone who speaks out so strongly against something that seemingly is so very beautiful, so I remember reading some of his notes about that. I was like, it's useful, and how Sam Harris speaks out against religion – you know, it's *very* useful to have people who are willing to shout something that... "*Whoa*, they said that?" and kind of add that to the conversation, just to even stoke the fires of actually *thinking*. You know, there is something very useful to actually thinking.

And that's the other thing in the spiritual conversation, you kind of get into that ... you're going for "no thought" or you're going for the silence and it's like, "Hold on, you have an incredible capacity to reason, it's very useful to use that." Because so much of the beauty of our world is created through that process of sitting together and hashing over ideas and thinking, just like we're doing now.

>>Rick: Yeah, again, we come back to the point of: it's the whole package. If you just lock into one component of it and make that the all, then you've got a lopsided situation. **But it's always more; the whole package.** And traditionally that was understood, I think, by many of the great teachers and sages, they didn't just narrow it down to some particular flavor of experience or Nonduality or whatever; they generally offered a more complete teaching.

Again, we're talking about dead people but...

>>Benj: Well no, I get what you're saying, that there's a value to make sure we include everything.

>>Rick: Yeah, yeah.

>>Benj: All the aspects of our life – cleaning the toilet, voting for the president and caring for the kids, all of those things have to be included in my...

>>Rick: Yeah. Well **I think we beat that point to death.**

>>Benj: Totally, what else?

>>Rick: **In a nonviolent way, of course.**

>>Benj: Sure, oh yes. We *feather*-fluffed it to death.

>>Rick: Tickled it to death.

>>Benj: Oh yeah, that's a good one. I appreciate this, thank you so much.

>>Rick: Yeah, this is great. It's funny because when I listened to all your videos and stuff I was thinking, "Well, am I going to be in danger of being too intellectual with Ben? I mean, he just seems to be such a down-to-earth guy and I tend to get off in my thoughts and theories and so on and so forth," but I think we've really found a nice balance here. And **you're anybody's match on the intellectual level as well as the heart level and everything else.** I really appreciate your integrated development and perspective.

>>Benj: Yeah, I'm still learning it.

>>Rick: Oh yeah, aren't we all? We are works in progress.

>>Benj: It's fun to play. And you know, I think of the videos sometimes, like you said, as performance art. There's a seriousness within the conversation that I like to try to soften, but then there are also moments where it's useful to be serious. So the videos have been a very fun way to play with ... just think about it like taking different angles on different ideas. And I appreciate being able to share it; it's a very funny thing.

>>**Rick**: Yeah. One thing I meant to ask you, I didn't actually *watch* the videos; I do this thing where I have this software that downloads ... I can go to a YouTube page and download, in one stroke, *all* the videos and convert them to audio and then bring them into iTunes, within a few minutes. And then put them on my iPod and then I'm listening while I'm riding my bike or cutting the grass, or stuff like that.

And so a lot of times I heard you doing this thing which to me sounded like kundalini explosions or something, it's like you were kind of like {Rick mimics a quick, short, repetitive breathing sounds} – is that what it was? Were you having a kundalini episode or something?

>>**Benj**: Yeah.

>>**Rick**: Oh okay, I was just curious, because I couldn't tell from the audio.

>>**Benj**: Well there's a little beatboxing in there, but then there's the kundalini as well.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, the beatboxing was cool too. You can actually get up on a stage somewhere and do some of that, it would be of fun.

>>**Benj**: Yeah, I don't know. Let's see, it hasn't happened yet. I don't know, I don't know. I might be shy when it comes to actual reality, I don't know. Videos ... I mean, I can't say, I don't know until I stand up there.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, you don't strike me as being a terribly shy person.

>>**Benj**: I think I am sometimes.

>>**Rick**: Yeah well, eat Powdermilk biscuits.

>>**Benj**: What's that from? I feel like i just say a sign but I don't know what it is.

>>**Rick**: Garrison Keillor from *Prairie Home Companion*, he does these ads for the Ketchup Advisory Council, and Powdermilk biscuits – “they give shy people the courage to get up and do what needs to be done.”

>>**Benj**: Ahh, awesome. I'll have some in a bag before I ....

>>**Rick**: Alrighty, well, let's wrap it up.

>>**Benj**: Alright.

>>**Rick**: So this has been great fun Ben.

>>**Benj**: Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate it.

>>**Rick**: Yeah, now before you hang up on me, I just want to make some concluding remarks for those listening. I've been speaking with Benjamin Smythe. Do you have a website?

>>**Benj**: I do, it's [www.benjamintsmythe.com](http://www.benjamintsmythe.com)

>>**Rick**: Okay good, and I'll be linking to that from [www.Batgap.com](http://www.Batgap.com) , as always do with my guests. You haven't written any books I don't suppose?

>>**Benj**: No.

>>**Rick**: No problem. But anyway, I'll link to your website and maybe also to your YouTube page, or maybe you'll link to that from your website, so people can watch some of these videos that I've been talking about.

For those who might be new to this program, I do one every week. I think this might be number 117 or something, and I got new ones coming up every week. So if you have enjoyed this, you might like to tune into some of the others and you can also watch it in video format. You can also have yourself be reminded by subscribing to the YouTube channel or going to [www.batgap.com](http://www.batgap.com) and signing up for an email reminder.

There is also a Podcast there that you can sign up for, so that you can listen to the audio on your iPod or whatever. And there's a discussion group that crops up around every interview, which sometimes gets very lively. There's also a Yahoo! chat group that you'll find a link to from there.

So there are all kinds of possibilities. So check it out and thanks for listening, thanks for watching, and we will see you next week.

>>**Benj**: Cool, have a good day.

>>**Rick**: Thanks Ben.

>>**Benj**: Bye, have a good day, thank you.

{BATGAP theme music plays}