

Rupert Spira - BATGAP Interview (# 259)

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{BATGAP theme music plays}

Rick: Welcome to Buddha at the Gas Pump. My name is Rick Archer and my guest is Rupert Spira. I interviewed Rupert 2 or 3 years ago, and I've been feeling lately that it's time to interview Rupert again. So I ran into him here at the conference – the Science & Nonduality Conference – and we were talking and we thought, 'Well yeah, maybe in the coming year sometime we'll do it, in 2015.'

And then this morning he gave a talk that I attended, in which he later told me he felt he was really being radical. And I really liked what he was saying and a lot of the points he made were triggering questions and points of discussion in my mind, so when I ran into him a little later out on the patio I said, "Let's do it this afternoon if you're available." And so here we are, that's what we're going to do.

So I thought I might start Rupert, by just asking you to give us the jist of what you said this morning, and then we'll take it from there.

Rupert: That's a difficult place to begin Rick, because I don't remember very much of what I said this morning. Remind me about the core...

Rick: Well one thing we started debating out on the patio is whether consciousness needs a mind and body in order to know or experience itself.

Rupert: Yes, yes. [In] the talk this morning, I started relating this story about a lecture I had been to recently by a professor of philosophy at Oxford University, who had said that the ideas of philosophers who say that consciousness can know itself should be put in the trash. And then I went on to speak about the experience of consciousness knowing itself, which he had denied the possibility of, and in particular, whether or not consciousness requires the finite mind in order to know itself.

And it's a very prevalent idea in many – you hear it often in spiritual traditions and many contemporary teachings – that consciousness needs the world to know itself, and in particular that it needs the finite mind to know itself. This is a misunderstanding.

Consciousness knows itself by itself. Consciousness knows itself in the same way that the sun illuminates itself. To suggest that consciousness needs the finite mind in order to know itself, is like suggesting that the sun needs to light a candle in order to be illuminated. It's an absurd proposition.

Rick: There's a verse in the Gita that says, "The self knows itself by itself."

Rupert: Absolutely, absolutely. It is so easy to check this in our experience because neither of us want to sit here speculating about whether consciousness knows itself by itself or not. Experience must be the test of reality, only experience can decide this matter for us.

Rick: I'm glad you're saying that because this could seem like a very academic, metaphysical discussion if we didn't point out that the only reason we're having it, is that we're interested in experience rather than just debating philosophies.

Rupert: So Rick, let's start by ... if I were to ask you the question: are you aware?

Rick: I would say, "Yes."

Rupert: You would say, "Yes," okay. How do you know?

Rick: How do I know that I'm aware?

Rupert: Yeah.

Rick: It seems self-evident? If I weren't, I would have heard you ask the question.

Rupert: Okay, now what is it that knows the experience of being aware? Whatever it is that knows the experience of being aware is obviously what we call 'I,' but can you be more specific? From your experience you agree 'I am aware.'

Rick: I do.

Rupert: Now *what* is it that knows the experience of being aware? It is your *experience* that you are aware, whose experience is it?

Rick: Pat answer would be: my experience, my experience that I'm aware.

Rupert: What is the 'me' that you are referring to? What would be its qualities - the 'me' that knows that I am aware?

Rick: I guess the question would be, "Aware of what?" And if it's aware of something like your voice, then there's a process of consciousness which operates through sense organs, which brings me information from the apparent outside.

Rupert: Okay, exactly, and for that very reason, if I were to ask you: are you aware of the door over there?

Rick: I would say, "Yes."

Rupert: You would say, "Yes," why?

Rick: Because there it is.

Rupert: Because there it is – you direct your attention toward it and you can say, "There it is, it is my experience." Now if I was to ask you: are you aware of the tingling sensation at the soles of your feet?

Rick: They are somewhat numb but ... yeah, I feel them. I wasn't thinking about my feet when you pointed out the door.

Rupert: No, when I asked you about the door you directed your attention towards the door. When I asked you about your feet, you directed your attention towards your feet. Now take the current thought, whatever it might be, are you aware of that thought?

Rick: Yes, 'you have brown eyes.'

Rupert: In order to know that thought you must direct your attention towards that thought. Now, ask yourself the question: am I aware? The answer you have already answered quite rightly is, "Yes," but *where* do you go to find that answer?

You don't direct your attention towards the door, you don't direct it towards your feet, you don't direct it towards the thought. What happens to your attention, because the answer "yes" comes from your experience?

Rick: It's self-referral, curving back that takes place.

Rupert: Okay, so describe what happens to the attention. Is it directed in a particular direction?

Rick: Inward, well in an out ...

Rupert: Inward is a metaphor that is often used, but when you say "inward," be more specific. What does inward mean? Follow your attention, ask yourself the question: am I aware? And this time, before answering yes, pause and see what happens to your attention as it goes to the experience of being aware. Where does it go?

Rick: It self-reflects or self-inquires; it doesn't pursue a thought, it doesn't pursue a sensory perception, it sort of turns back on itself.

Rupert: Yes, but if the attention turns around, I know that this is the conventional formulation – the "turning around of the attention" – but our attention can only be directed towards an object.

Rick: Correct.

Rupert: Just to make sure that that's clear, try now to direct your attention towards something that has no objective qualities.

Rick: I do that every day when I meditate.

Rupert: No, but just now take the attention you are directing towards the door, now try to direct it towards something which is not objective.

Rick: Well if you go like *that* (Rick closes eyes) when you say it, then there's not going to be anything out here.

Rupert: No, but there's objects ... wherever you go there are objects, so it's obviously not there. So now try again to direct your attention towards something which is not an object.

Rick: I would close my eyes [because] there's no point in having extraneous sensory inputs. My mental activity would begin to settle down, because I'm not really concerned with it in this process.

Rupert: Yes, you're not attending to it.

Rick: No, because it doesn't serve the inquiry you asked for.

Rupert: Now where does your attention go?

Rick: As it settles down, you know it's not the first time I've used this metaphor, but it's kind of like the movie playing on the screen getting less and less opaque, more and more transparent, and as it does so the screen becomes more apparent. That's the best way I can describe the experience.

Rupert: Yes, okay ... where I was trying to lead with the questions was that when we are asked the question 'Am I aware?' in order to answer the question from experience, our attention has to *go* to the experience of being aware. So our attention removes itself from any object - from the door, from the sensation, from the thought - and it *looks* for the experience of being aware. But it can't find it, because attention can only be directed towards an object. So the attention vacillates for a moment between objects, looking for the experience of 'being aware.'

Rick: If you think that's where you're going to find it.

Rupert: It can't *find*, whether it goes outwards or inwards, it cannot find the experience of being aware. Anything it focuses itself on is not the experience of being aware; it is what we are aware *of*. So the attention vacillates for a moment and then it begins to subside. It sinks back and it goes back, and back, and back, and back, until it reaches its source, at which point it ceases to be attention, because attention can only stand by being directed towards an object.

Without an object to be directed towards, the attention cannot stand; it *falls* or collapses back into its source, and at some point is revealed as pure consciousness, that is, consciousness without an object. And now having understood this, we can redefine, or rather define attention as: consciousness *directed* towards an object.

In the absence of an object upon which to focus our attention, attention cannot stand, and it falls back, through lack of support, into its source, and that is the process. In fact, it is a nonprocess, it is a nonpractice. The rising of attention is an activity; the sinking back of attention is the cessation of that activity. It is often called 'meditation,' and it seems to be an effort that we have to make. It is not an effort that we have to make; it is the cessation of a previous effort, which we didn't realize that we were making.

So this nonpractice of sinking the attention into its source is what is in Sanskrit called 'Atma Vichara,' which for many years has been misleadingly translated as self-inquiry.

Rick: Which sounds very intellectual.

Rupert: Because when people hear 'self inquiry,' what is an inquiry? An inquiry is an activity of the mind directed towards an object. So when we hear 'practice self-inquiry,' the first thing we all think, and I thought this for many years, is that self-inquiry is an activity of the mind searching for the 'I.' And then of course the question arises: well, which 'I,' and where is the 'I?' And we're all aware of the confusions that have arisen around which 'I' are we inquiring into, and what is the process of inquiry?

Atma Vichara is better translated not as self-inquiry, but 'self-abidance' or 'self-resting.' In Uspenski's tradition it is referred to as 'self-remembering.' Again, that was in most cases misunderstood because it is only possible to remember something with objective qualities; that was not what was meant in that tradition, but it was misunderstood.

So again, the mind went off in search of a self that it was supposed to be remembering. No, it's a nonobjective remembrance of our eternal nature; its recognition, its re-knowing of itself. Now, why is it called a recognition? It is because previously, the attention or awareness or consciousness rises in the form of attention in order to know something other than itself. And when consciousness knows something *other* than itself, such as an object or person or world or thought, it, as it were, turns its back on itself. It ceases gazing at itself, rises in the form of a finite mind or attention, and in the form of the finite mind or attention, it can look away from itself. And this apparent looking away from itself involves the forgetting or overlooking of itself. And this is the, in the spiritual tradition, what is called the 'primal ignorance,' the ignoring of the reality of consciousness.

So when attention sinks back into its source, it doesn't know something new, it recognizes something which it has always known, but *seemed* to overlook because of the exclusive focus of its attention on objects.

Rick: The nature of the senses being to direct the attention outward toward objects, and in the process, as you're saying, the inner awareness is lost or overshadowed. And of course the movie screen analogy is always used – the objects of sense fall on the screen of the mind, overshadow pure awareness and it appears to be lost, just as the screen is lost when the movie plays upon the screen. Would you agree with that analogy, that structure?

Rupert: Yes, yes, we could say [that] the rising of the finite mind, or attention, is the rising of the movie on the screen. But in this analogy it is important to point out that the screen – it's not a conventional T.V. that is being watched by somebody sitting on their sofa; it is a self-aware screen, it is a magical self-aware screen. When the movie appears, it is watched by the screen, the screen is aware of the movie that appears on it.

Now, the movie appears, there is a person walking through a landscape, [or] a person walking through a field. The person looks around and sees fields and trees and flowers, and mountains and sky and clouds. In other words, the person in the movie looks around and sees a multiplicity and diversity of objects, all of which are separate from itself. So the person in the movie feels, 'I, the self, here, with my finite mind located here, looks out and sees a multiplicity and diversity of objects.' That's how it looks from the perspective of the character in the movie. However, the character in the movie is not doing the watching; the character in the movie is not aware. The character in the movie is *made* out of the self-aware screen, but it doesn't know it.

The character in the movie feels that that knowing with which it knows its experience, belongs to its body, but it is the self-aware screen – only the screen is aware. Nothing else could be aware because there's nothing else there, apart from the screen, to be aware. Now when the screen views the movie, does the screen see a multiplicity and diversity of objects? No, because in the screen's experience, all there is is the screen, the indivisible, intimate, infinite screen, and that is pure consciousness. That is infinite consciousness, but we cannot even say that

consciousness is infinite; it is just a concession to the finite mind that believes there are objects. Because from consciousness's point of view, there are no finite things which it is not.

In order to say consciousness is infinite or not finite, there must be things that *are* finite, and then we could say, "No, consciousness is not any of those things." But there are only finite things made out of matter, from the illusionary point of view of the finite self, [which is] made out of mind.

From consciousness's point of view, there is only itself. Pure consciousness never knows or comes in contact with anything other than itself. And so we cannot say that consciousness is infinite; that is a concession. It is legitimate to say such a thing as a concession to the belief in objects.

If we believe that objects are real, finite objects are real, then it is legitimate to say that consciousness is infinite. But when we realize that there is *just* consciousness, we can no longer call consciousness infinite, we can no longer even call consciousness, consciousness, because consciousness as opposed to what? Consciousness is always as opposed to objects.

So really, we should stop talking now. We cannot name the reality of experience, it truly is unnamable. And yet, our entire experience of all this multiplicity and diversity of name and form is itself made out of something that has no name and form; it has no dimensions.

Think of this, and this is our experience, consciousness itself doesn't have a dimension. Don't try to think of that. It is not possible to think of something that has no dimensions.

Rick: If it had dimensions it would have to be relative, because only the relative things have dimensions.

Rupert: Yes, anything that has a dimension – time, space or objects - is relative to the appearance of the finite mind. And the finite mind only appears in the waking and the dreaming states, in other words, it is not absolutely true.

Rick: Well the original question, the main point I remembered from this morning's conversation was: does consciousness *need* a mind or a nervous system, or any of that, in order to know itself? And let me throw something out and see what you have to say, and that is that consciousness by definition is conscious, and being conscious, what does it have to be conscious of other than itself? Because what else is there on the level of consciousness, besides consciousness? And yet its nature is to be conscious.

And so if consciousness, whose nature is to be conscious, has to be conscious of something, it can only be conscious of itself. But in so doing, if it does this, then all of a sudden the one has bifurcated into the knower, the known, and the process of knowing, which are called rishi, devata, and chhandas, in Sanskrit.

Rupert: Consciousness doesn't know itself in the way the finite mind seems to know objects. I'll define the finite mind more clearly in a minute, if you remind me.

Rick: Sure.

Rupert: The finite mind always knows things in subject-object relationship. I, the finite mind here, knows you, the person or object over there. So the way the finite mind knows is, by definition, in subject-object relationship. Consciousness doesn't know itself in subject-object relationship; it *is* the knowing of itself.

Let me give you a metaphor to try to make this clearer. Imagine the space of this room. Now add the quality of knowing, or consciousness, to this space, so it's not just an inert, empty space; we've added knowing to the space. It is a *knowing* empty space.

Now take out all the objects and the people so that there is just empty knowing space. What does that empty knowing space have to do in order to know itself?

Rick: What makes you think that if we're talking about a room, which is a relative manifestation full of air-molecules and stuff ...

Rupert: No, just keep the metaphor of space.

Rick: Oh, okay, an empty space with no particles or anything.

Rupert: An empty knowing space, what does it have to do to know itself?

Rick: I'm not sure that we want to say that space or emptiness *could* know itself.

Rupert: No, it's a metaphor Rick.

Rick: Well why don't we just use the word 'consciousness': what does consciousness have to do in order to know itself?

Rupert: Because it's too damn straight, because I'm trying to make it more concrete for you.

Rick: Let's go straight there.

Rupert: Okay, what does consciousness have to do to know itself? And the reason I gave you this metaphor is because in your previous response, you said that in order to know itself, consciousness had to divide itself into a knower and a known. So it was in response to that comment that I tried to give you the metaphor of space, but I'm happy to stay with 'consciousness;' let's stay with 'consciousness.'

The nature of consciousness is knowing, or pure awareness, pure knowingness. Now what does it need to do to know itself?

Rick: Is this a trick question?

Rupert: No! Not at all; it's a straight forward question. But I want to make sure that when we're talking about consciousness [that] we're not talking about some abstract. *You* are conscious, yes? What do you have to do to know that you are conscious? What does your consciousness – I'm calling it *your* consciousness – what does consciousness have to do in order to know itself?

Rick: Well there are two questions there. If you are talking about me, what do I have to do ...

Rupert: I'm talking about *you*-consciousness.

Rick: Oh, me as consciousness.

Rupert: You-consciousness, what do you have to do to know that you are conscious?

Rick: If you are speaking of universal awareness ... when you say 'you,' it's a personal pronoun that refers to 'me,' Rick Archer.

Rupert: It refers to you, what you essentially are.

Rick: Essentially?

Rupert: All your life Rick, you have been saying, implicitly rather than explicitly, 'I am aware of the world. I am aware of my thoughts. I am aware of my feeling. I am aware of the taste of tea. I am aware of the face of my friend. I am aware of this conversation. I am aware of the sensation of my hand on my cheeks. I am aware of the temperature of the air. I am aware of the hum of the A.C.'

I am aware, I am aware, I am aware, I am aware. All your life, you have always been 'I,' yes? You have always referred to yourself as 'I.' Now, have any of your thoughts remained present all your life?

Rick: No.

Rupert: Have any of your sensations remained present all your life?

Rick: No.

Rupert: Perceptions?

Rick: No.

Rupert: But 'I,' you acknowledge, has remained present all your life. Now what does 'I' refer to? It must refer to that that has remained with you all your life. What is that?

Rick: If I can give it a word: the knower, the self, the screen of awareness which enables ...

Rupert: But try not to use a metaphor; try to use an experience. What *experience* in you?

Rick: Consciousness.

Rupert: The experience of being aware, I am aware. So let's have no doubt now when we say 'I,' when I say 'you,' I'm speaking to consciousness.

Rick: Okay, the same consciousness as you?

Rupert: Let's not go there; let's not go there for a moment because I want to stick with your original question, which is about whether consciousness needs to rise in the form of a finite mind in order to know itself. Let's stick there.

First of all we want to be clear about what I mean by 'you,' when I say, "You, Rick." What do you-consciousness – we've already ascertained now, you've agreed, what I am is that which is aware – now what does that which is aware have to do to be aware of itself?

Rick: Well I think the second verse of the Yoga Sutras gives a good ...

Rupert: No, I don't want to know the Yoga Sutras. I want to know your experience.

Rick: No but really, it's very germane. My experience is described by that verse, which is ...

Rupert: But I want to hear it in your words Rick.

Rick: Okay, I'll pretend I wrote this.

Rupert: Okay, fair enough!

Rick: Yoga is chitti, vritti, nirodha: yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind, and then the self is known. So it's the ongoing turbulence or agitation or activity of the mind, and of the senses and so on, that has kept and keeps people bound in their individual boundaries all their lives. And when they find a way to allow that to secede, as we were speaking earlier – to settle down, to diminish down to nothing, without actually falling asleep, then what do you have left? Consciousness knows itself without an object.

Rupert: Let me ask you a question Rick.

Rick: I'm speaking experientially here, not just having read the Yoga Sutras.

Rupert: Are you aware?

Rick: Yes.

Rupert: What happened between the question ... between the thought 'Are you aware,' and the thought 'Yes?'

Rick: Some billions of neurons fired and interpreted the words ...

Rupert: No, no. What happened in your experience: we hear the question "Am I aware," pause. You didn't pause long, it's true, but you are seasoned at this, you don't need to pause long. We hear the question "Am I aware," pause.

Rick: There's a moment of reflection perhaps.

Rupert: Pause, answer "Yes." The question "Am I aware" is a thought, the answer "Yes" is a thought. What takes place in-between those two thoughts? You become aware that you are aware.

Rick: Yeah, there's a moment of self-reflection, of introspection.

Rupert: I become aware that I am aware; it's a long hand version of the statement in the Old Testament: "I Am that I Am." I am that which is aware that I am. The 'I' that is aware knows that it is aware. That experience of being aware of being aware, took place in-between these two thoughts.

Awareness didn't have to go anywhere. In order to know the first thought, awareness or consciousness had to rise in the form of the finite mind. When that thought came to an end, attention - the finite mind - plunged into its source, and then in order to formulate the answer "Yes," the finite mind rises again in the form of the thought 'Yes.' But in-between these two thoughts, the attention plunges into its source and is revealed as the simple experience [of] 'I am aware,' or 'being aware of being aware.' Now how difficult is that?

Rick: Now most people aren't going to have Rupert asking them that question all day long, and I've known people and interviewed people who, in my opinion, more or less, tormented themselves by continually asking that question, probing, asking that question, while trying to live an active life, or perhaps finding themselves incapable of living an active life.

Rupert: But Rick, I'm sorry Rick; I want to keep on track. You asked me the question about whether consciousness needs to rise in the form of the finite mind in order to know itself, and I don't feel we've finished with that question.

Rick: No we haven't, and I actually have a whole kind of cosmological angle on that [that] I want to bring.

Rupert: Yeah, and I want to stay *right* on the issue and not deviate from it until we've – and I'm trying to bring you, in an experiential way, not referring to the Sutras, not referring to the great teachers, not referring to metaphors or concepts; I'm trying to show you in your *direct* experience that you-consciousness, have the experience of knowing your own being in the absence of the finite mind. And that that is not the *extraordinary* experience that happens after 30 years of meditation to one in a million people, if they're lucky; it is everybody's experience, it is available to everybody equally.

If we had Ramana Maharishi sitting here and we asked him the question "Are you aware?" - I guess he would probably just smile at us, but let's suppose that he would answer, "Yes." In-between the thought 'Are you aware' and the answer, "Yes," his attention would sink into its source.

If we had somebody here, taken off the streets, who had *no* idea about nonduality or spiritual matters; a die-hard materialist sitting on the other side of the room from Ramana Maharishi, and we said to her, "Are you aware?" she would probably have to pause a little longer than Ramana Maharishi. But as long as she understood the question and she was interested in participating, she would hear the question "Am I aware," pause, "Yes." She would go to *exactly* the same place in her experience that Ramana Maharishi went to in his.

In that moment, her attention would have collapsed momentarily into its source, and in that moment the experience of awareness being aware of itself would have shone briefly in her experience. I say briefly because in her case, through force of habit, the finite mind would have risen almost instantly again, in order to go outwards into the realm of objects, whereas Ramana Maharishi's attention would have remained resting in its source.

Rick: So what you're saying is it is the same thing, but in this case it is perpetual, stable, nothing Ramana has to do to ...

Rupert: What I'm saying is that in order to know something *other* than itself, consciousness needs to rise in the form of the finite mind. And only in the form of the finite mind can consciousness cease knowing its own being, or *seem* to cease knowing its own being and know something *other* than its own being. However, in order to know itself, it doesn't need to rise in the form of the finite mind; it remains at home, it knows itself simply by being itself.

That is the way consciousness knows itself, simply by being itself. It is self-luminous, like the sun. In order to illuminate the moon the sun needs to shine its rays on the moon, but in order to know itself, it doesn't need to do anything with its light; it is self-luminous. It knows itself by itself, without the aid of any other object.

Consciousness is self-luminous. It does not need to reflect itself off a puny little finite mind in order to know its own being, and I'm not talking abstract philosophy or metaphysics. I am trying to show you that you have the experience on a regular basis, everybody does, of attention sinking into its source. In other words, the finite mind sinking into its source and standing revealed as this self-knowing, self-luminous consciousness.

Rick: And I would suggest that for someone like Ramana, and maybe for some of us, to whatever degree of clarity we are permanently sunk, there doesn't have to be a sort of, "Well, let me sink in, check it out;" there's sort of a perpetual appreciation of that source quality, that source level of life, in addition, but it has been integrated and stabilized to the point where it can be a living reality. We can be riding a bicycle or giving a lecture, or doing whatever we do, and we don't have to keep checking in or doing anything whatsoever; it has been sort of infused or stabilized in such a way that it is as natural as breathing.

Rupert: Well, I don't want to presume to speak about Ramana Maharishi's experience, but what I can say for myself is that when the attention sinks, and it's not a one-time thing. It's not, "Oh, the attention has sunk into its source and stands revealed as consciousness."

Rumi described it so beautifully. He said, "Flow down, and down, and down, and down in ever widening rings of being. It's just sinking, and sinking, and sinking, and sinking of the attention into its source. And *as* the attention sinks into its source, it is gradually, in most cases - very occasionally suddenly - but gradually in most cases, the attention is divested of all the limitations that thought and feeling have superimposed on it. And at some point attention stands completely undressed, it stands naked. And attention undressed, attention divested of all limitations is pure consciousness.

Rick: And at that point I would say, the word 'attention' is no longer a word we would want to use.

Rupert: Attention is no longer attention. The word 'attention' comes from ...

Rick: It has the implication of directing or focusing.

Rupert: It comes from the Latin word 'tendere,' which means to stretch. So attention is the stretching of awareness towards an apparent object. So in attention there is always a subtle effort. We've become so habituated to giving our attention to objects that we actually don't notice that it requires a subtle effort.

So attention is a stretching of awareness or consciousness to an object that is seemingly outside of itself. So this sinking of attention is the relaxation of this effort towards the object. So you are absolutely right, when all the tension goes out of attention, it no longer stands as attention; it is revealed as inherently peaceful consciousness. Consciousness in which there is no tension, no agitation. It is this knowing of our own being, or consciousness's knowing of its own being in us.

It shines in the mind as the knowledge 'I am,' or 'I am aware. And it shines in our feelings as peace or happiness. So the experience of peace or happiness *is* God's footprint in the heart.

So in this way, by exploring our experience in this way, we come to understand that consciousness doesn't *need* anything other than itself to know itself; it knows itself by itself. It is this self-recognition which comes about through this *non-practice* of self abidance.

Now to go back to our conversation about the arising of the world. When the attention rises again after this recognition, when it rises again, it is clear that the attention never actually leaves consciousness. Previously we thought that the attention left ourselves and came in contact with an object that is separate from our self, now it is clear to us that attention never leaves consciousness; attention is a modulation of consciousness itself.

So as the finite mind rises, it rises in two forms: one - in the form of thought, two – in the form of perception. Normally, thought takes up residence inside, perceived objects take place outside. But now with this new feeling understanding, this new self-recognition, it is clear to us that the attention never leaves consciousness, never comes in contact with anything outside consciousness. Everything that arises arises *in* consciousness, is known *by* consciousness, and is made *of* consciousness. So all experience is a modulation of this infinite consciousness.

And that is what the Sufis mean when they say, "Wherever the eye falls, there is the face of God." It is what the Sufis mean when they say, "There is no God but God." When they say "There is no God," they mean no object has its own existence. There is no such thing an object that exists. Existence comes from two Latin words: 'ex' and 'sistere,' meaning 'to stand out from God.'

No object truly stands out from consciousness or being, and comes into existence. Nothing ever *leaves* consciousness, no *thing* ever comes into existence and stands with its own being. That's what it means – "There is no God," things don't have their own being. The apparent existence of things is God's existence, is the being of infinite consciousness.

So no *thing* truly exists. There is no real existence, nothing comes into being and nothing leaves being; there is just this infinite, eternal, ever-present Being, knowing and being its self, alone.

Rick: And if things did come into existence and leave Being, then Being wouldn't be ever-present or infinite or omnipresent, or any of those things, because it would have had to be, kind of like, cordoned off into some little area, which is excluded from the glass or the table.

Rupert: Exactly! It is not possible for infinite consciousness to know a finite object. Because imagine, you have infinite consciousness and then a little finite object appears. Now that little finite object would displace just a tiny part of consciousness' infinity. In other words, consciousness' infinity would no longer be infinite.

Rick: There would be a hole in it somehow.

Rupert: There would be a hole in it! Because there was a finite object there, which would immediately make consciousness a finite subject. In other words, it is only possible to know a finite object from the point of view of a finite subject. Infinite consciousness knows *nothing* of finite subjects and finite objects. Infinite consciousness knows nothing of a separate self made out of mind, or

the outside world made out of matter. The separate self made out of mind and the separate world made out of matter are fabrications of thought.

Rick: So how does this become a living reality? If someone like, let's say Ramana, is established in infinite consciousness, and yet can read the newspaper as he did, and listen to the radio, and help in the kitchen and those things, he is obviously interacting with a world - from all appearances, but I presume you are saying that from his subjective experience, there is no world with which he is interacting; there is, as they call it in Sanskrit, a "faint remains of ignorance." A Lasha-Vidya world that is like a sheen on the surface of infinite consciousness, that without which there would be no functionality, there would be no ability to interact or experience or engage.

Rupert: Again, I don't want to speculate about Ramana Maharishi's experience.

Rick: It's good to take examples though to try to illustrate what you are saying, so it's not just academic.

Rupert: No, no, on the contrary. It is academic if we take examples of people like Ramana Maharishi, although as you know, I hold him in the highest regard and the highest esteem. But we cannot speak of his experience; that is academic. We can only speak of our own experience.

So we should bring it out of the realm of speculation and academics, and always referring to other peoples' experiences and other peoples' scriptures, although we learn a great deal from them. And we should bring it to our own experience, because experience is the test of reality, not what a great sage says in a book, however much respect we have, and indeed I have, as you know, huge respect for Ramana Maharishi.

But precisely as a result of the respect I have for Ramana Maharishi's teaching, I have learned to trust experience alone.

Rick: Good. So let's talk about your experience.

Rupert: I've been talking about my experience all afternoon.

Rick: Okay, so without putting it in the first person, all these descriptions you gave are descriptive of your experience?

Rupert: Yes, let's go back because we were talking about how the world, how our interaction in the world appears after this self-recognition. And I'd like to refer to one of my current favorite quotations by the poet Shelley, who said, "Life, like a dome of many colored glass, stains the white radiance of eternity."

Rick: Hmm, so you get to quote Western guys but I don't get to quote Eastern guys! 😊

Rupert: That's a fair comment. I apologize Rick. But at the risk of being a little defensive, I am only using Shelley because he is so eloquent, and so I'm just borrowing his words. I'm not referring to an experience that I don't know about; I'm borrowing his exquisite words because they are so much more eloquent than mine.

Rick: Well, Patangali is no slouch.

Rupert: But I am now – and you’ll be happy about this – I’m now going to alter Shelley’s words in order to make them my own. Because if we explore our experience, no experience, no thought, no feeling, no sensation, no perception stains the white radiance of eternity. No experience stains infinite consciousness.

Rick: Your own experience or anybody’s own experience?

Rupert: Everybody’s own experience, but I can only speak from my own experience. I would suggest, because I’m speaking of consciousness’s experience, I-consciousness am not stained by any experience. I’m speaking on behalf of the only consciousness there is.

When each of us feels the experience ‘I am aware,’ we are referring to the same experience. When we go to the experience of being aware, each of us goes to the same consciousness. I’m speaking on behalf of that consciousness. I have no special access to that consciousness; I have no more access to that consciousness than anybody does. But on behalf of that consciousness, which is the only consciousness that I or any of us know, “I-consciousness am never stained by experience. Every experience, it doesn’t stain me; it colors me.” All experience is a coloring. So this is where I would like to just tweak Shelley’s words: “Life, like a dome of many colored glass, *colors* the white radiance of eternity.”

Rick: Okay, so the radiance of eternity remains pristine and untouched.

Rupert: If we are to take Shelley’s metaphor of the white radiance of eternity, imagine a piece of watercolor paper, and experience is like a ‘wash’ over it. Or it is like a coloring of the screen, it doesn’t stain it, it passes over it. And every experience, whether your experience is the experience of a wonderful ecstasy, a beautiful samadhi, a deep depression, a toothache, the taste of tea, this conversation, no experience stains consciousness. Every experience leaves consciousness pristine, luminous, empty, infinite.

But I would go even further – I want to tweak Shelley’s words even more – because to begin with, when we turn on the TV, and I’m now talking the conventional TV being watched by someone on their sofa, it seems as a result of the absorption of our attention in the movie, it seems that the screen vanishes.

Now, if our attention is exclusively focused on the image or the movie, we first seem to find the screen *behind* the image. And in exactly the same way, most people first find consciousness as the witnessing presence of consciousness in the *background* of experience. So we have the foreground – thoughts, sensations and perceptions – and we have the witnessing presence of awareness in the background. That is how most of us find consciousness first.

But in fact, the screen is not in the background of the image. When we turn the movie on, the movie doesn’t obscure the screen; all you are seeing is the screen. So this is where we can tweak Shelley’s words even more: “Life, like a dome of many colored glass, doesn’t simply *color* the white radiance of eternity; it shines with the white radiance of eternity.” All there is in experience is consciousness shining. No experience truly obscures consciousness.

The pedagogical neti neti approach - “I am not this, I am not this,” approach – is a concession to the separate self. It is a teaching device, and a legitimate teaching device, for those of us whose

attention is so fascinated by thoughts and feelings and sensations and perceptions, the teaching says to us, “No, see that you are that which is *behind* all of this, knowing it. And all of this – thoughts, sensations and perceptions, seem from this point of view, to obscure this witnessing presence of consciousness. And it is a legitimate approach because it establishes, not just the presence of consciousness, but the primacy of consciousness.

Once that has been established, the neti neti approach has done its job, we should abandon it because it keeps us in separation: the witnessing presence of consciousness here, the body-mind world there. And this collapse of the distinction between consciousness and its objects is the, we could call it “the next stage,” where we don’t see experience staining or obscuring consciousness. No, all experience shines with conscious, all there is to our experience is consciousness and you can check that in your experience.

Ask yourself now the question: do I ever know or come in contact with anything other than the knowing of my experience? Has anybody, ever, come in contact with anything other than the knowing of their experience? Imagine someone walking on the moon, imagine a nuclear physicist, imagine someone in a deep depression, imagine a microbiologist, go *anywhere* you like in the realm of experience – the wonderful experiences, the awful experiences, *everything* - do we ever know anything other than the knowing of experience? No.

All that is there is knowing. It is not even the knowing *of* experience, because we never find anything other than knowing. It is not the knowing of something; it is just knowing. It is knowing, knowing, knowing. The self knowing and being itself alone.

Rick: Two or three years ago when I interviewed you the first time, you probably don’t remember this, but I really hammered you on this point of seeing the world in terms of consciousness, or in terms of the self and so on. And I said, “I get the first part – the witnessing and all that stuff - but I really can’t crack this second part.” And I’m happy to report that this second part has really come a long ways since then, and there’s much more of a constant appreciation of this divinity inherent in everything, this pure consciousness inherent in everything. You don’t need to comment on that, I just wanted to give you a progress report.

But a minute ago you were talking about that Shelley quote, whether consciousness can be stained or is only colored, and so on, and it kind of reminded me of the sun analogy. The sun could say, “Doesn’t matter to me whether or not there’s clouds; I’m shining nonetheless. Clouds make no difference whatsoever.”

But the thought that comes to mind that if this is going to be a practical consideration, and realizing the limitations of metaphors, we have to acknowledge that the vast majority of humanity is on the other side of the clouds, and that the shining sun is obscured.

And a few minutes ago you mentioned that the symptom of being established in pure consciousness is peace and bliss, or peace and happiness.

Rupert: Peace and happiness, not peace and bliss.

Rick: We could argue about this too, because it is just a superlative degree of happiness. But for the vast majority of humanity, that unfortunately is just a fantasy or pipedream; it is not their actual

experience. So we can talk about consciousness never being overshadowed, and never knowing anything other than itself and so on, but in terms of what people are actually living - these poor people in Syria or Africa, to take extreme examples, the stuff people go through – they wouldn't know what in the world we're talking about. It is not within the realm of their current experience.

And so I guess there have been many great sages and teachers who have felt compassion for such people, and have done their best to somehow get this message to them, so that they too can have the kind of experience that they were having, to whatever extent was possible. So I do tend to think in terms of the practical implications of anybody's teaching, in terms of its ability to help others rise to that level of experiencing it, rather than it being a teacher describing his own experience and the audience saying, "It sounds great, but I've got to go home and face the music."

Rupert: If we really consider the implications of what we've been speaking of, and I don't just mean consider theoretically, because what we've been speaking of has been based only on our current, direct experience. The conclusion that we've arrived at, the experiential conclusion that we have arrived at, is that all there is is indivisible, unlimited consciousness that knows nothing other than itself.

Now what does that mean? If that is our experience, if we have come to realize this, what does it mean for our experience? When you are speaking with somebody, when you're walking along the corridors here, when you're eating your meals, when you're brushing your teeth, when you're dealing with your taxes, when you're dealing with your equipment for your interviews, when you're paying for your groceries at the check-out counter, when you're paying the cab driver? It means that you never come in contact with anything other than God's infinite being. *Live* that. Live like that.

Live every moment of your life with this feeling-understanding, that there is just God's infinite, indivisible, infinite, intimate being. Treat everyone like that, not just your close circle of friends. Not just all people, but all animals, not just all animals, but all objects, because there are no objects made out of dead, inert stuff called 'matter.'

Matter is a concept that was invented by the Greeks two and a-half thousand years ago to account for that part of our experience which takes place outside consciousness. Scientists have been looking for it for two and a-half thousand years. Don't you think they would have found it by now, if it was there? They are still looking! They've been looking for two and a-half thousand years – scientists or philosophers. It is not there!

Rick: They think they've found it, most of them do. In fact, most of them deny the reality of what we're talking about; they say *that* comes out of matter.

Rupert: But it's not there because all they find is an appearance in a finite mind, and a finite mind is itself a temporary appearance; it appears in the waking state and the dream state. So this stuff called 'matter' out of which the universe is supposed to be made, is not absolutely true; it is relative to the finite mind. It is a perception in the *mind*. But nobody has found stuff called matter, nobody has found anything that is not a perception.

But I don't want to go off down that track, what I'm saying – to answer your question about “living” this – not just with people, not just with animals, but with objects. This (pointing to an object) is no less God's infinite being. Your nearest and dearest friend - and when I say “This,” I'm suggesting that there is this separate object; experience is always one. Are you now having 10,000 experiences or one experience?

Rick: It's funny you should mention the number '10,000.'

Rupert: We're having one experience. Experience is always one. Experience is never divided into 10,000 things. And treat – I'm keeping with your question – *live* like that. To treat everyone and everything not intellectually, but that everything you know or come in contact with is your own – and I say “your own” – you, God's being, God's infinite, indivisible, intimate being shining in all your reference. Live like that.

If we live like that, that is the greatest contribution, it is the greatest gift we could ever give to humanity. There is nothing greater that we could give to humanity than that.

Rick: [I] totally agree, and over the course of the past 46 years I've dedicated my life to living like that. And it is a work in progress, but still, I'm living like that more and more as time goes on.

Rupert: I would have to say Rick, you are a beautiful example of that. And what you do with your website and your interviews is your unique and utterly beautiful way of sharing this experience. And you are doing it in your own unique way, I'm doing it in mine, everybody is doing it in their own way.

Rick: Yeah, I mean you probably do what you do because you do want to share it. You're not content to just make ceramics; you want to get out there and share something that you found to be precious.

Rupert: I do what I do simply because I love it.

Rick: You love it! Me too, exactly.

Rupert: I love it ... for no other reason.

Rick: It's a joy, it's fun.

Rupert: I have no mission; it's just somewhere Atmananda Krishna Menon says that, “A moment comes when you can no longer keep what is inside you, inside. It just comes bubbling outside of you.”

Rick: “My cup runneth over.”

Rupert: I'm just doing what I love doing and I'm not doing it for any reason.

Rick: That's sufficient reason in and of itself – that you love it – if we want to call that a reason. Now the reason I perked up when you mentioned the number 10,000 is that I was ...

Rupert: Sorry, I interrupted you. I keep interrupting you.

Rick: That's okay. I had just been thinking about the fact that over the course of the next year, let's say, tens of thousands of people will watch this interview, and they'll all hear you say, “Live like

that.” And I can imagine 99% of them saying, “Sounds great, how? What do I do? What do I have to do to live like that?”

Rupert: Okay, when you pass a homeless person on the street who is asking for money, you give them money or you don’t, whatever you choose. But when you do so, you look into their eyes. And you have this feeling-understanding that what they truly are is this luminous, open, empty, imperturbable space of pure knowing, or pure consciousness.

In other words, with your feeling-understanding, you feel in your heart that this is what they are, they have temporarily forgotten that. But you interact with them, whatever your interaction, whether it is giving them a coin or whether it is paying your cab driver, or talking with your neighbor, or whoever you are dealing with, you hold in your heart this feeling-understanding: ‘That which I am relating to is this luminous, open, empty presence that is identical to myself. Not identical to myself, but *is* myself.’ You feel that, and you allow that feeling to inform your dealings with that person.

Now with the homeless person it will express itself one way, with your child it will express itself in another way, with your neighbor it will express itself in another way. So this feeling-understanding is continuously being tailored to the moment, and expresses itself in different ways from moment to moment, but what *informs* our interactions with people is always this same feeling-understanding that what they are, who they really are, is this infinite being.

And then we don’t just do this in our interactions with people, but with animals too. We feel about animals in the same way, and we treat them in the same way. We first of all evoke this feeling-understanding, we know that what this apparent animal truly is is identical to what we are, and we behave, we treat the animal accordingly. That will be different from the way you treat your child or your neighbor, or the cab driver. You’ll tailor this feeling-understanding, but nevertheless, however you relate with the animal will be an expression of this feeling-understanding. And then don’t restrict it to animals; include objects.

Rick: Amoebas, insects, whatever.

Rupert: Yes, sure. Frogs, beetles, mosquitoes.

Rick: Well mosquitoes, I swat them.

Rupert: I didn’t say don’t swat a mosquito; all I said was feel in your heart. Your question was about the practical application, if we can call it that.

Rick: Sorry buddy, I love you but ... next lifetime...

Rupert: But do the same with objects, because apparent objects, so much of our experience seems to be an interaction with a world made of dead stuff called ‘matter.’ Get rid of the idea of dead matter. Just scratch it from your repertoire. It is not necessary, it is an outdated belief.

The new science is not the science of physics; it is the science of consciousness. Live that by feeling, not just understanding intellectually, but by feeling that everything, *everything* you come in contact with is God’s infinite being, shining. Treat everything like that and don’t wait for this grand realization before you start doing it; no, start doing it now.

Even if everyone here, if we don't feel this, we are at least profoundly open to this possibility. *Live* as if this was the case and the universe will find so [many ways] ... your friends, strangers, the universe will find so many ways of letting you know that you are treating them in the right way. The universe will find ways of smiling at you saying, "Thank you for relieving me of the burden of being made out of this dead stuff called matter."

The universe, through synchronistic events, through playful interactions, will find innumerable ways – playful, humorous, loving – innumerable ways of letting you know, "Thank you for treating me as I am!"

Your friendships will grow in depth and tenderness and intimacy, you will feel this contact with animals and with nature. And you will feel that everything is alive with conscious and the world will let you know. The world will say "Thank you" to you. Every day the world will let you know, "Thank you so much for treating me as I am. I have been suppressed by the burden of materiality for so long, and now, now you are treating me as I am. It is such a relief." The world will thank you over and over again.

Rick: "Whatsoever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me," and that would include the glass ...

Rupert: Beautiful, yeah, and make sure that "the least of these" is not just human beings, although that's a good place to start.

Rick: And not just animate things, even.

Rupert: No, don't make a distinction between animate and inanimate. Because we have traced our experience back to the place where there are no distinctions, there are no selves, there are no objects, there is no outside world made of matter, and now we're going *back* from that understanding, back into the world of appearances. But we're taking this feeling-understanding with us, and we're allowing – it is called the 'transfiguration' in the Christian tradition – we're allowing the light of infinite consciousness, which we have discovered is our essential nature, to *flood* the world, to saturate and permeate not just this body-mind, not just our relationship with a few close friends; but to saturate, pervade and saturate the entire realm of experience, so that all experience is colonized by this feeling-understanding.

Rick: There's this saying, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which means "the world is my family."

Rupert: Beautiful, yes, yes.

Rick: But now the thought that was kicking around in my mind as you were saying that, which you actually have now begun to answer was that, for many people that feeling-understanding is pretty well snuffed out, and for others it is a little tiny spark, and for others it is a raging inferno, and all kinds of gradations in-between. But what you begin to say is [that] by taking whatever degree of it you have awakened to, and beginning to utilize it by treating everything with the kind of kindness and compassion and affinity that you have been alluding to, [that] you'll fan the flame and the spark will brighten.

Rupert: Yes, yes, yes. That's true Rick, because the light of consciousness is never snuffed out.

Rick: Yeah, not utterly, but it gets pretty darn dim in some peoples' experience.

Rupert: Yes, but just think about your experience when it is pretty darn dim. Let's imagine a depression.

Rick: Me at the age of about fifteen, sixteen.

Rupert: Okay, so imagine a depression, it is a form of suffering. And by definition, in our suffering we are longing for happiness. It is not possible to suffer and not, at the same time, long for happiness. In fact, suffering and the longing for happiness are the same thing.

So our suffering, the separate self feels it as the experience of suffering. The separate self feels 'I am suffering and I need to go in search of happiness.' That is the separate self's erroneous interpretation of its experience. What is actually happening is that the source of happiness itself - pure being, infinite consciousness - it has a gravitational force to it. It is *pulling* the separate self back into itself. That gravitational pull is felt, from the point of view of the separate self, as the longing for happiness. The separate self feels 'I long for happiness.' No, it's not the separate self that longs for happiness; the separate self, if we can see the existence of the separate self, it does nothing. It is happiness that is pulling the separate self into itself.

There's a beautiful prayer of a monk in the 16th century: "Lord, thou art the love with which I love thee. I thought that I was loving thee; it is you that is loving me. It is your love, the love with which I love thee, belongs to you. I thought it was mine." It is the same thing, we feel 'I am suffering and I am seeking happiness.'

Suffering is the desire for happiness, is happiness itself *calling* us back. It is saying, "Sweetheart, come back to me. Stop looking for me out there. Stop looking for me in the realm of objects, substances, states of mind, relationships. I'm not there. You have been looking for me there for decades. Can't you see I'm not there? If I was there you would have found me by now. No, turn around, come back to me, come back to your home in me." That is the experience of suffering. Suffering is a call from happiness.

So even in our darkest depressions, the light of pure knowing is never extinguished; it shines in everyone. It shines in everyone's feelings as the longing for happiness, and the longing for happiness as such, is God's footprint in the heart. It shines in the mind as the knowledge 'I am,' or 'I am aware' - that is God's signature in the mind.

And these are the two possible paths: we either follow the longing for happiness in the heart, or we follow the thought 'I am aware.' And if we trace either the feeling of longing for happiness or the understanding 'I am aware' back to their source, these are the two paths of bhakti and Jnana, they take us to the same place.

And nobody, however dark the depression, we can always say, "I am aware." The experience of being aware is available even in our darkest moments, that is the light of pure knowing shining in the mind. Likewise, even in our darkest moment, the longing for happiness is never extinguished. That longing for happiness *is* God's footprint in our hearts, it cannot be extinguished.

Rick: Beautiful. We have heard such phrases as "The kingdom of heaven is within," so there's this inexhaustible treasury of happiness and so on, within us. I often think of the analogy of

someone who has ... you hear these things on the news, someone wins the lottery and he doesn't realize he has won, and he's got the winning ticket in some sock drawer or something like that. And he goes on for a year and almost misses the deadline - working at some job he hates, and life is horrible and all that stuff – not knowing that he's actually a multimillionaire, already, and all he had to do was be notified and cash in the ticket. And of course that doesn't give him happiness, but it's only an analogy.

So we are all, analogously speaking, multimillionaires who just haven't realized that there's a ticket in our sock drawer, that it is time to cash it in.

Rupert: Yes, that's a nice example. And that the ticket in the sock drawer [is] the knowing of our own being, is not something exotic or extraordinary, or something that is only available to one in a million.

Rick: It is the birthright of everyone.

Rupert: *Everybody* is aware, everybody knows the experience of being aware. If we went out onto the streets now and asked, took a survey of all 7 billion of us – or maybe, how many of us are there now? 8 billion of us – and asked them the simple question: are you aware? They would all pause and say, "Yes." That's it! They're being, the experience of being aware of being aware is *equally* available. It is even closer to us than the sock drawer. It is not buried. It doesn't have to be earned. We don't have to discipline the mind to reach it; it is just right there, wide open, just ready to be turned towards.

Whenever you ask yourself, "Am I aware?" there it is, your own being shining. Whether you are depressed, whether you are happy, whether you are sick, whatever your circumstances, it is always there, always available, to everybody, equally.

Rick: Since we're throwing out a bunch of Bible quotes, there is of course the famous one, "Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened." And I always translate that as meaning – and I know there are some gurus and saints who say, "Take one step towards me, I'll take a thousand steps toward you," – I think there is magic in that initial intention to step in the direction that you're talking about, to discover what you've been describing. And that initial intention works wonders, and one step leads to the next.

So if you don't feel like, "Okay, it's day two here and I'm really not totally getting what Rupert was saying," take day three. Just keep that intention lively, and let it be continually enlivened more and more, and it bears fruit.

Rupert: Yes, yes, that's very true. As a concession to the separate self, the teaching traditions give the separate self something to do – self inquiry, self surrender, or whatever. The teaching of course knows better. The teaching of course knows that there is no separate self there, either to do something or not to do something. But out of compassion, the teaching tailors itself to the moment, and elaborates various means or paths through which the apparent separate self may take a step towards its reality.

Of course when the separate self dissolves in its source, there is this realization, 'I was never a separate self. The separate self never came into existence and the separate self never dissolved out of existence.'

Rick: Give us the T.S. Elliot quote.

Rupert: There was *just* consciousness all along, but as a *concession* to the belief in a separate self, as a *compassionate* concession to the separate self, the teaching will elaborate these means.

Rick: I've heard the analogy [of] a man standing in the middle of a big mud puddle, and someone is out on the end of the mud puddle and he says, "How do I get out of this mud puddle?" And the guy on the edge says, "Take a step."

"You're asking me to put my foot in the mud?"

"Just take a step ... another step." Eventually he is out of the mud puddle.

The word 'Vedanta' means end of the Veda - 'anta' means end – and a lot of times people just want to just sort of be at the end. But whether you pursue a Vedic path or not, there may all sorts of steps that ultimately appear to have been necessary, but from the perspective of the guy in the middle of the mud puddle maybe necessary, to get to the point where that final realization can dawn. And as much as everyone would like to *leap* from the middle of the mud puddle to being out of it, what that often amounts to in my experience is, people talking the talk but not really living what those words represent.

Rupert: You are talking about the traditional progressive Vedantic path, and I have respect for that, and I was on that path for many years. What I am speaking of here is something different; it's the direct path.

Rick: But what I was suggesting is that the fact that you were on it for many years brought you to the direct path.

Rupert: That doesn't mean that 25 years on the progressive path is a prerequisite for the direct path; it is not.

Rick: For anybody? Nobody?

Rupert: All that is necessary for the direct path is to ask yourself the question: am I aware? And to pause and to follow your attention back to the experience of being aware, and to stay there, that's it.

Rick: Some people might find in their experience, that that's easier said than done – staying there is the trick.

Rupert: When I say stay there, I don't mean stay there forever; I mean just allow the attention ... you can use this question as an aid: am I aware? It is a new formulation of the traditional question 'Who am I?' You could use this question or there are many other questions we could use.

You use this question, 'Am I aware?' simply as an aid to gently encouraging the attention to sink back into its source, and just encourage it to rest there. By force of habit, after maybe a short while, the attention will rise again and go outwards towards an object. And if the attention is required by the world, then we should leave our attention dealing with objects. However, when

our attention is no longer required by the world, instead of manufacturing another object or series of objects with which to keep itself busy, we can again ask this question or a similar question, and thereby encourage our attention instead of resting on an object, to flow back to its source and rest in its source.

And after some time, it is no longer necessary to pose a question to our attention; it is done without words that the attention is no longer required by the world, and there is this spontaneous sinking back of the attention. And after some time we begin to taste the peace that is available in the depths of our being, so the attention needs less and less encouragement to go back to its source. It is happy to go back there.

Rick: Yeah, and it remains there even when it is dealing with – you’re saying when it is finished, but I’m suggesting [that] even when it is dealing with objects, perhaps even intensely, that we can continue to taste that peace; it is not an either or situation.

Rupert: That is very true, but I was responding to your question about whether the attention should stay there. I wasn’t suggesting that one should make a disciplined effort to keep attention resting in its source; it is *natural* for attention to go out to objects.

What normally happens is that when there isn’t an object to attend to, we manufacture an object or a series of objects; this is the addiction to thinking ...

Rick: Yeah, we will turn on the radio or something.

Rupert: ... in order to keep the attention rising or risen. So it is just this gentle encouragement for the mind to sink into the heart, as Ramana Maharishi said, this falling back of the attention, and soon we begin to taste the peace of our true nature. There is less incentive for that attention to leave its home, unless it is required by circumstances, in which case it leaves home, deals with the circumstances, and just comes back naturally to rest. The important thing is [that] it is not a discipline of the attention.

Rick: No, it is a natural style of functioning after a while.

Rupert: It is a relaxation, and the attention should be gently and lovingly encouraged to sink back into its source; it shouldn’t be disciplined. It is not an effort; it is the relaxation of an effort.

Rick: Well there’s two ways of keeping your dog at your door. One is you chain it, the dog pulls against the chain and keeps tugging. Another is to put some good food there, and the dog will just be there.

So the source is this bliss, or field of happiness you have been referring to, is the good food.

Rupert: Exactly, the peace of our true nature is the good food, and after a while the dog doesn’t want to leave home.

Rick: Right, and again the limitations of metaphors, but the dog manages to stay on the porch while exploring the woods. In other words, fully engaged in action and yet established in peace that passeth all understanding.

Rupert: Yes, yes, yes.

Rick: Not an either or.

Rupert: Objective experience first seems to veil our true nature, and as a result the teachings suggest that we locate awareness as the witnessing presence in the background of experience. And then we abide *as* that presence of awareness and in this abidance, awareness is gradually divested of its limitations and at some point stands revealed as eternal and infinite, and ever-present and unlimited. But then we return to the objects of experience, or rather, we allow the experience to return to us. We don't go out to them, they come to us. And then we see that all experience no longer obscures the presence of consciousness; experience shines with the presence of consciousness.

Rick: Or if it does, maybe it doesn't obscure it to the same extent, having had a taste of that. So we come back to it again.

Rupert: Okay, that's right. There's a halfway stage where experience doesn't obscure pure consciousness, nor does it shine with it; it just colors it, temporarily colors it. But then the more we live this understanding, even the sense that experiencing is a coloring *over* pure consciousness begins to give way. Pure consciousness shines *through* all experience, until all objects, thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions, however pleasant or unpleasant, are felt to shine with consciousness.

Rick: Yeah, and speaking of coloring, there's an analogy. In India they used to dye cloth by dipping – they probably still do – by dipping it in a dye and then bleaching it in the sun. And back in the sun it would lose most of the color of the dye it had been dipped in, but a little bit would be left. And then they would dip it again, and then they would bleach it again – oh, more color! Dip it again, bleach it again, do that enough times and it's just as colorful in the sun as it is in the dye, and it doesn't get faded anymore.

Rupert: Yes, yes. This peace that we first found in the background of experience begins to percolate through, shine through into the foreground of our experience, so that all our experiences ... we don't have to go into the background anymore to find this peace; experience is pervaded by this peace.

The light of consciousness shines through experience. Experience becomes progressively transparent to the light of pure knowing, more and more transparent, so the light of pure knowing shines more and more brightly. When I say the light of pure knowing, it is a metaphor, that peace of true nature, this causeless happiness, imperturbable peace shines through the objects and the objects become increasingly transparent, increasingly empty, increasingly empty of object-ness, increasingly full of the light of God. God shines through all experience.

Rick: Well I don't know if we can do any better than that, so that would be a good place to conclude. I could actually, with a little preparation, could do a whole other interview because there is a whole other little compartment of interesting stuff, but that would tend to be more speculative and metaphysical. And I think this has been much more direct to our actual experience, as you kept bringing me back to doing.

Rupert: Yes, I'm not very good at speculative ... I'm very simple Rick. I've just learned one very simple lesson in life, and that is: experience alone is the test of reality. I've just learned to trust

experience, and over the years to question, to question, to question, to question: what is my actual experience? And of course I've received a great deal of help from my teacher and teachers, and people that I have read and studied and pondered, over and over and over.

And I have just gone deeper and deeper and deeper into what my actual experience is, and I have come to this experiential conclusion: all I ever know is ever-present, unlimited consciousness, God's infinite being. The 'I' that knows it is that which is known. There is just God's infinite being. That's just the simple experiential conclusion [that] I've come to through trusting my experience.

Rick: I'll give you a teaser of what we might do a few years from down the line, and that would be: if consciousness is the only reality, how do objects appear to come into existence? And how is it that there seems to be such an incredible, vast, intricate hierarchy of structures, and laws of nature, and intelligence operating at all the various levels of creation that scientists identify? What's actually going on to have brought this about?

Your original point was: why would consciousness need anything to know itself, so the question might be: why is there a universe? Does it somehow have a purpose in enabling consciousness to play with itself, or even know itself in a way that in a completely unmanifest state wouldn't have happened?

So I realize that's a little bit metaphysical, cosmological, but I think it's meaningful because it can become relevant to our experience. I think our experience can answer those questions and can develop in subtlety and nuance and richness, so that that becomes a really germane line of inquiry.

Rupert: Maybe that's for another time. Can we stay with God's infinite being shining in all objects?

Rick: Yes, we should. As I said, it was just a teaser, you know? P.T. Barnum said, "Always leave 'em wanting more."

Oh, well this is great Rupert, and I *really*, really enjoyed this. I'm so glad that we did it instead of over Skype or something.

Rupert: I quite agree Rick. It is lovely to spend time talking with you again, thank you.

Rick: Yeah, if I could I would do all my interviews in person, like this.

Rupert: Yes, yes, and I'm very glad to have done it like this, and I think that what you're doing is such a beautiful gift to humanity, and thank you for doing it.

Rick: Well I'm just like you – just doing what I love. No great credit for it or anything.

Rupert: No but, I understand.

Rick: So let me make my usual concluding remarks. I have been speaking with Rupert ... it's 'Spira' not 'Speera,' right?

Rupert: 'Spira.'

Rick: 'Spira,' [with] a long "i." We are at the Science & Nonduality Conference – a plug for our host at Science & Nonduality Conference, which Rupert and I have been to every year, for probably a few years now, as well as many other wonderful people.

And as you can imagine from hearing this conversation, it is a very lively place to be. And a number of people have come up to me at the Conference and said, "Gee, I'm here because I've heard you mention it so many times." So there are a lot of other good conferences and all kinds of things you can do and places you can go, so I'm not claiming any sort of exclusive, specialness for this, but it is just something I happen to enjoy.

And I appreciate our hosts, Maurizio and Zaya and Benazzo, for allowing me to do these interviews here. He did say to put a banner up and I said, "Alright, I'll put a banner up but I draw the line at any kind of tattoo!"

So there may or not be another one or two interviews while I'm here at the conference, but whether or not there are, this is an ongoing series. I've been doing it for five years now. There are over 250 interviews online at www.batgap.com – B-A-T-G-A-P. So if you go there you can explore around, and there's a 'Past Interviews' menu, and they are categorized in several different ways.

There is a 'Future Interviews' menu, showing what's coming up, there's a 'Donate' button, and if people never clicked that then I wouldn't be here, so I appreciate it when people feel motivated to do that.

There is a newsletter you can sign up for, to be notified by an email about once a week, when every a new interview is posted. There is a chat group that you can participate in, which is fairly strictly moderated these days because we want it to be a very civil, intelligent place to have a discussion, and not a place to sort of trash one another, as sometimes happens in online discussion groups.

And there is also an audio podcast of this whole thing, which has almost as many listeners as the YouTube thing has viewers. So if you don't have the time to sit in front of your computer for hours on end just watching things, put it on your iPod and listen during your commute, it would be, maybe, of some value.

So thanks for listening or watching, and we'll see you with the next one, whatever that might be.

{BATGAP theme music plays}