

Joan Shivarpita Harrigan - Batgap Interview (#299)

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Rick: Welcome to Buddha at the Gas Pump. My name is Rick Archer. Buddha at the Gas Pump is an ongoing series of interviews with spiritually awake or awakening people. There have been nearly 300 of them now. If you would like to check out the archives, go to batgap.com look under past interviews and you will see them categorized in about five different ways. We also rely on the support of people who appreciate the show in order to be able to put all the time and attention we do into it and so if you feel like donating there is a button on the right hand side of the page.

So my guest this week is Joan Harrigan, and her spiritual name is Shivarpita, and I am really excited about this interview. I met Joan briefly about 6-7 years ago before I even started this show, but I don't think she remembers me from then.

Joan: I do.

Rick: She came to a meeting we had in Fairfield that we had this weekly satsang thing going and she has a center down in Tennessee called the Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care Center. Lot of my friends have gone there, at least half a dozen I think, may be seven or eight that I know of and probably more and we will be explaining during the course of the interview what that center does and what Joan does, but I have been reading her books in preparation for this as usual and I am just really impressed with the depth and breadth of her knowledge and the background through which she acquired that knowledge. And I think you will see in the course of this conversation, at least in my opinion, this knowledge would be really useful to the contemporary spiritual scene. There are so many people who have had awakening and they are not quite sure how their awakening fits into the grand scheme of things, whether it's preliminary, whether it's final, many times people feel their awakening is final but then it turns out not to be, and I have often felt that there should be much more systematic understanding of all the various possibilities and it would be very helpful to seekers and aspirants to have that understanding. It would safeguard and facilitate their path, and I think Joan's work really does provide that understanding if you take the time to study it, and it is not just an intellectual thing, she actually has a way of kind of helping, maybe this is a wrong wording and she can correct me, but sort of diagnosing where a person is at and how their Kundalini rising might be stuck or diverted in certain ways and is able to provide specific training or instruction to unstuck it and get it going in the right direction. So we will talk about that, but I think this should be really valuable for people, and I am really pleased to have her on. So thanks Joan for doing this.

Joan: Thank you. I am happy to...

Rick: So let me just start by reading a bit about your bio and about the Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care and then we will go into little bit of your background. So Joan Shivarpita Harrigan is the spiritual director of the Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care Center, PKYC for short. She has practiced, studied and taught Raja Yoga and Advaita Vedanta for more than 30 years. She has been tutored as a designated successor in America in the Kundalini Vidya lineage founded by Gomitigiri Maharaj, learning the oral commentary teachings of traditional Kundalini Science from her spiritual mentor, Chandrasekharanand Saraswati. She is a retired psychologist. She has been a brahmacharini, a novice, in the Shankaracharya Vedic monastic order since 1987. She is the author of Kundalini Vidya: The Science of Spiritual Transformation. (I was reading it on the plane last night. I just came back from seeing Amma in Boston for couple of days). Also, new book, Stories of Spiritual Transformation: The Fulfillment of Kundalini Process, which I have also read part of. That book is not published yet, is it Joan?

Joan: No. I hope to have it out this fall.

Rick: Incidentally apologies to those who had hoped to watch the live streaming of this interview. We just spent half an hour trying to fix it and it's not working for some reason and I will just have to diagnose that

during the week and get it working for the next one, but for general knowledge most of these interviews are livestream and there are usually anywhere between 40 and 80 people on live and it's kind of nice because they send in questions during the interview relevant to the interview and it helps to sort of enliven things. So keep that in mind for future interviews. Way to find the livestreaming is to go to the future interviews page on batgap.com and you will see a link for each interview that will take you to the YouTube page where you will see the livestreaming at the scheduled time.

As I mentioned, I feel like Joan has dedicated her life to this thing and has a wealth of knowledge and it is almost like - I feel like I don't know if it sounds too flattering and embarrass you, but there is this reservoir and I have to bring as large a pipe as possible up to the reservoir in order to extract as much water from it during this process and so I really hope to do justice to what Joan has to offer and maybe we will even do a second interview one of these days as well, because I am sure we cannot cover everything in two hours. So I think we should start with some basic questions. Everyone has heard the word Kundalini, but I think there are probably a lot of different understandings of what exactly it is and Joan has a very specific understanding and definition of it. So let's start by getting that. What is Kundalini Shakti.

Joan: Kundalini Shakti is basically the divine presence within every human soul and it motivates and guides our spiritual yearning and intention and makes it clearer to us what we need to do to cooperate with that spiritual source within us to get deeper and deeper to the source.

Rick: Why is Kundalini Shakti often referred to as "She"?

Joan: According to the Vedic scriptures, the Mother Divine is the source of the manifestation of all of creation as it unfolds cascades forth from the one. So it is given a feminine principle gender to acknowledge that it is manifest, even though Kundalini Shakti is the least manifest of all of the cascades of manifestation.

Rick: So it is like the initial sprouting of manifestation.

Joan: That's right. Yes, exactly.

Rick: For those who are not familiar with that concept, the idea is the manifest universe arises by degrees and in physics it is sometimes called sequential spontaneous symmetry breaking where one begins to diversify and then becomes more, more and more diversified and then we end up with just millions of different laws of nature and qualities and everything else. But if we get right down near the source, the diversification is very minimal, and it just barely begun to break into the four fundamental forces and then those multiply and so on so forth. So there is equivalent understanding of that in Vedic tradition.

Joan: Exactly. And it is depicted nicely in the Sri Yantra which has the interwoven triangles going up and down set in a square with gates and circles and petals and the rims of triangles get smaller and subtler until finally there is in the center a dot, a bindu, which is the one. And Kundalini Shakti is anthropomorphically depicted as having her big toe on that point in the middle of the Sri Yantra, so the goddess is the personification of the geometric symbol of the entire universe which Sri Yantra depicts.

Rick: That's interesting. I was just seeing that in your book last night, I had never known that, so that is interesting but it is significant.

Joan: Yes.

Rick: One thing that fascinates me a lot, and I think about it all the time is the fact that intelligence is ubiquitous. It is like anything you consider, near, far, big, small, if you really think about what is going on even in terms of what science has told us is absolutely brimming with intelligence, packed with intelligence, as evidenced by the amazing order and perfection with which the complexity of life is administered and I kind of

get the feeling from what I have been reading of your work that in your tradition this would be understood to be the province of the goddess or of Kundalini Shakti which gives rise to the universe whereas consciousness value, Shiva value does it contain intelligence also or is it just flat manifest and the intelligence conducting the universe is attributed to more divine feminine quality.

Joan: Well, the divine feminine is said to have the first describable attributes, the first tiny degrees of phenomenal qualities that can be described. Pure consciousness however is nothing, its not void, it is awareness, it is sometimes described as pure light. It is all pervading, eternal, one without second. And it is the ground from which the manifestation cascades, but because it is beyond mind, beyond space and time, it cannot be actually described, it must be experienced. So as we go inward in the spiritual journey from the gross to the subtle through the koshas as they are described, the sheaths, the veils or shades surrounding the light, the grossest is the physical, material world, then there is pranic, the energetic or the life giving force then there is mind which would be lower mind which would include the collection of all our karmic material through many lifetimes and the sensory motor mind – manas that the senses go out and take in data and the ahankara which identifies and takes ownership of the beliefs and preferences.

Rick: That's the ego, right? The I maker...

Joan: Yes, the I maker...So the chitta is this vast storehouse.

Rick: What's the relationship between ahankara and chitta, you just mentioned both.

Joan: Yes. These three functions of mind are in the manomaya kosha. So it is chitta the storehouse of vasanas, which are desires and drives, and samskaras, which are the impressions from all of our past experiences, the grooves get deeper and deeper through lifetimes and we come in with certain patterning.

Rick: Before I forget to question, it seems like vasanas and samskaras must be very closely related. If vasanas are desires and drives and samskaras are the impressions, the impressions must very much guide and influence the drives or the vasanas, right.

Joan: Drive for example would be hunger and the samskara would be chocolate in particular.

Rick: (Laughter) Right. Or if you had some addiction to food then you must have heavy samskaras around food.

Joan: Yes. So vasanas, desires, samskara is the particular way that manifests and all of that is basically our karmas. And our subconscious is just filled, overflowing with this from so many lifetimes. Ahankara identifies with that material and owns it and the ego structure that "I ness" the "I maker" and then manas wants to go out through the senses to objects to fulfill what the chitta is stirred up about. And then Ahankara just says yes that's who we are, that's what we need, that's what we do. Then there is higher mind, the Buddhi, which is responsible for discernment and being able to tell really what's real, what's unreal, what's helpful, what's not helpful, what's really going to bring us to spiritual fruition and what is illusion and in the way.

And beyond even that is Anandamaya Kosha which is the peacefulness beyond mind. That is the dwelling place of Kundalini Shakti as she is veiled by the subtle body which is Prana, lower mind and higher mind – Buddhi, beyond the causal where she dwells, veiled by the subtle is the one which is the source.

Rick: It is interesting that the blessed self is regarded as a sheath or is something which can obscure oneness.

Joan: Exactly, and that is one of the spiritual materialism traps. Well, it is sort of like spiritual marketing also. People think I just want to be happy and I can get this high from transcending and meditating and its lovely and it becomes an escape and it becomes an attachment. If that is what one is after just a pleasant mental experience

or even a glimpse perhaps beyond mind that is sattvic, peaceful, but it has not gone far enough to really be the goal.

Rick: So maybe not right now but somewhere in the course of the interview we will have to talk about how one can proceed through each of these sheaths and beyond each of these sheaths in order to get to the core and not get hung up at one stage or another thinking that one has finished. We will talk about that.

So on the definition of the Kundalini, there are a lot of theories and understandings out there about what it is. There are all kinds of people recommending all kinds of things to either enliven it or avoid it and in the course of doing these interviews; I have done a number of them with people who just go along minding their own business and ended up having rather profound Kundalini awakening and didn't even know what it was and started doing research on the internet thinking initially they had some kind of disease and then I know of cases where people ended up in hospital, because they went to a doctor and doctor said, "well, this is weird, here are some drugs." And so Kundalini has bit of a bad rep in some quarters as being something scary and dangerous because some people have had difficulties, so maybe we should address that right now.

Joan: I think there are four main ways currently of looking at Kundalini. The first would be secular or psychological which is more like what you just described. It might come from a medical model that Kundalini is a weird horrible, capricious energy that might attack you unexpectedly anytime and wreak havoc in your life and render you a strange kind of ill that people can't figure out and it's very difficult to treat, because of course it is not a physical melody. It is also not just difficulty with energy system. And usually when people have such a spiritual emergency they just want it to go away, and if they haven't had any spiritual training it is difficult for them to get the overview and the perspective and attitude that there is something holy and sacred at the core of this and this dramatic experience is an intense invitation for me to learn how to cooperate with what is wanting to happen and to try to understand it and relax into it and maybe there are some things that I need to change about my behavior, my attitude, the way I am in myself and my life that would enhance my experience rather than just fighting this discomfort. So in this spiritual emergency sort of model sometimes people are told to stop all spiritual practices if you are doing any, don't meditate, eat a lot of meat, do everything external you can think of, you need to be grounded. This may give some temporary relief of symptoms, but it does not address the source of this dramatic big message that the person is receiving, and that is that it's time to change something very fundamental and significant and allow this living process to go the way it needs to go in its own wisdom.

The second way Kundalini is looked at is from an esoteric viewpoint where people think, oh! there are siddhis to be had, and there are occult techniques that can be applied to get some real magic going and I can improve my psychic ability and my healing powers and my intuition, of course, for the benefit of humanity is usually how it starts so that I can ply my esoteric gift more skillfully and enhance my repertoire of abilities, but that is a slippery slope and it can be ego aggrandizing and is not spiritual actually. It's again spiritual materialism. It is looking for goodie instead for the purpose.

The next way people might look at Kundalini as if they have some yoga training and then you will get the standard, sort of at some point some force will come up the spine, explode in the head, opening the chakras, energy centers in the central column along the way sequentially and thus enlightenment can happen. This is a much simplified version of some of the ancient teachings that have been westernized and sort of co-opted into a psychological model mainly and also used for healing and so forth.

Rick: It is simplified in as you point out there are variety of routes that Kundalini can take. There are various cul-de-sacs that it can end up getting caught in. It's not as cut-and-dried as it is sometimes presented to be.

Joan: Exactly.

Rick: Also you can have all kinds of stuff going on that might seem like Kundalini awakening in your head and it actually is not that, it is the vayus doing something and Kundalini may not have fully awakened, any of the lower chakras.

Joan: This is the biggest misunderstanding around Kundalini. People say “Kundalini energy.” Kundalini is not energy. Energy as we saw in the description of the Koshas is just the second sheath right there inside the material, physical gross level material world. Kundalini Shakti is the very last, right at the edge of oneness. So to say that Kundalini is energy really makes it much more manifest and gross than it actually is. It is the Divine within. It is Divine and not the Divine’s energy.

Rick: I am laughing because there are so many questions I can ask you. I hardly know where to begin, but I will just keep winging it and rolling along as we go. One question that you just reminded me of when you said that – you mentioned Kundalini kind of guides people’s spiritual progress and that is interesting. I had always felt guided and I still do and I feel like there is some intelligence that knows better than I do what direction I should go in and stuff and if I am sensitive to that and cooperative then one thing leads to the next in a very nice way. I mean even this show; there was a lot of guidance around having it turned out the way it has so far and I had intentions that would have taken it in a different direction and those were not being supported and when I just sort of relaxed little bit and went in other directions then it was supported. But I have always kind of almost thought of that in a way of sort of some intelligence external to myself like guardian angels or some broader intelligence that was orchestrating me like a puppet.

Joan: Spirit guides or something....

Rick: Yes, something like that whereas what you are saying is that energy is very much within us and of course...

Joan: Divine presence...not energy.

Rick: Yes, intelligence or presence, right...kind of guiding us from within.

Joan: Definitely.

Rick: So when we have like deep, genuine intuitions which are like subtle impulses of go this way and go that way, would you say that is Kundalini guiding us? Maybe?

Joan: Usually, yes, if we can get our “I maker” out of the way and all of the desires and impressions from the storehouse of chitta and the sensory temptations from the manas, if we can clear our way through that to a deeper source then we are hearing the real prompting of the Divine within who just wants us to come home to that source and not get confused and take little detours – big detours.

Rick: So it almost sounds like each person has their own Kundalini Shakti that is coiled up in the root chakra that has to progress through their own system and yet the Divine we usually think of is universal and all pervading and omnipresent. So are both true that the Divine presence is omnipresent...

Joan: There is microcosm and macrocosm...

Rick: Yes, right, as is the human mind so is the cosmic mind. As is human body, so is the cosmic body, and so on...When we speak of Kundalini within the body, is it correct to say that it is like an individual expression for this person of that cosmic intelligence or cosmic presence.

Joan: Yes, it is just like there is the Jivatman which is the individual Self and then there is Brahman, and Atman is Brahman

Rick: Ultimately essentially.

Joan: Atman is the microcosm and when the illusion of separation from the individual self leaves and merges one with the one, there is only Brahman and that is all there is. Then we realize that the individual is universal. Likewise, with Kundalini Shakti, the Divine within, we each have that precious beloved at our core that is who we really are and the Divine of course is universal as well and all pervading and eternal.

Rick: Now many people seem to jump ahead. They say okay well the individual is cosmic, atman is Brahman and ultimately you are that oneness and therefore you really don't have an individuality and there is no person. And there are some teachers who based their whole teaching on this saying over and over again that there is no person, there is nobody doing anything and some of these teachers even conclude that there is no reincarnation because if there is no person how could there be reincarnation. What is it that would reincarnate. I think it is kind of a conflation of levels myself, but how would you comment on that perspective.

Joan: Well, until you are actually self-realized and experience true non-duality, I don't mean oneness like I would like to buy the world a coke because we are all a big happy family.

Rick: Yeah, Mad Men, the concluding episode of Mad Men if you watched that...

Joan: Yes...So conceptual oneness is clearly just the theoretical thing. People can get it philosophically, but before having it experientially we are still in dualism which means we have to deal with mind. We have to deal with the fact that we are embodied. That the prana system needs to be vitalized for us to make good progress that we have to abide by certain laws of the universe and nature that will keep us healthy and help us focus the mind. And the gunas, the qualities of nature are at play. So tamas - dullness, darkness and rajas - the activity, restlessness and sattva – peacefulness are all intermingled and in the spiritual path we are attempting to get beyond tamas which just keeps us sluggish and ignorant and use a little rajas to make us curious, find out things and do some spiritual practice and finally to really establish ourselves in sattvic lifestyle and develop a sattvic mind through spiritual practices which start with things like in Yoga – the yamas and niyamas and in Vedanta – the four qualifications, so that we have a more sattvic mind then we can be peaceful enough to get through again the koshas from gross to subtle and have increasingly frequent and clear insights as to the pure nature of reality, not get distracted by the senses and mind and settle into the awareness beyond mind. But until we have done that and start having actual glimpses of true oneness I don't know how other than a miracle.....(laughter)

Rick: Or past life karma fructifying or something...That happens sometimes.

Joan: Yes, coming ripe that one could actually progress through duality. I feel we need tools to progress through duality and that's what the great spiritual traditions of the world provide – ways for us to not get distracted and lost but to keep going inward, inward and inward to the actual source. There are faux oneness experiences like buy the world a coke and highs that can happen.

Rick: Just before we go on to that, remember that thought, just on the word progress. In some circles, progress is sort of a dirty word. There is a sort of debate between the direct path and progressive path and the direct people seem to be saying you are already that and why mess around with years and years and years of practices and progress because you are that, just sort of...

Joan: Absolutely. They are absolutely right, and if you can do that ...but if you are just sitting in your living room waiting for whatever day it is that your karmic number comes up and enlightenment arrives what do you do in the meantime.

Rick: Unfortunately, what a lot of people do is they read lot of books and these books convince them that they are that. And they often mistake that understanding for actual realization.

Joan: It is discernment. And it might be a bypass. And there are philosophical bypasses, there are psychological, mental, emotional bypasses, one can have an experience. It may be enthralling. It may be uplifting, inspiring. It may be a gift of grace. It may be a glimpse. But it may not be the actual true goal. It is discernment.

Rick: I met many people who have had glimpses. Some know that they are glimpses and they had this wonderful experience, and now it seems to - you know I didn't expect it the last time it didn't. And other people who have awakenings that are really significant. They think that wow this is it. And then maybe two years down the road they lose it again. What happened? How did I lose it? Why did I lose it?

Joan: Well, there can be reasons that one would have an actual some kind of experience and lose it if they didn't follow through and support and keep supporting what the Divine inner guide is directing them to do. If they get into rajasic and tamasic activities and thoughts and they are not unloading the subconscious really letting it go, not just watching it, but really that it is leaving then the nice experience that they had may not last because it gets gunked up with the old karmas falling in and filling up this beautiful opening that they had because they are not supporting it with sattvic spiritual virtuous living.

Rick: Yes, I have another question that I want to ask you right now, but I interrupted you a few minutes ago when you were about to say something. I said, hold that thought. You want to get that in before we go on?

Joan: Yes, I was going to say - around the misunderstanding of Kundalini Shakti. Most of the people that we have worked with came in this lifetime with already having had a Kundalini initial release in some previous lifetime. So they come in with Kundalini process. They are not waiting for that big initial release. They have it already, how many centuries ago, we don't know; how many lifetimes ago, we don't know; how did it happen, we don't really know. But it is active within them. And at some point in their life it might ripen due to some karmic moment or a blessed stimulation, the proximity of a saint or holy place or reading scripture that will inspire them or on the other hand it could be some very difficult thing in their life, a loss or something painful that punctuates the moment where they become aware of this process that has already been percolating. It is released, it is capable, but it is just not big enough for them to really say you know what - there is something powerful happening in my life now from within.

Rick: These types of people who have come into this life with Kundalini already awakened to some degree, is there something about their lives as children growing up that is different than other people who don't have any Kundalini awakening, are they remarkable in some way.

Joan: They are somewhere remarkable than other because there are so many different Kundalini process. But in reviewing scriptures and with our own case studies which is about 300 people who told their stories by way of getting an assessment of their Kundalini process, people with Kundalini process tend to be much more aware of the workings of their mind and of their energy system. They feel prana flow. They feel currents, surges and tingles and pinpricks. They feel heat, they feel activity in the brain area. They feel pressure perhaps. They are more aware of their inner life. They may be more imaginative, more creative, more intelligent than the average bear. They are sometimes more dissatisfied. They may be frustrated and seeking and have a yearning for something. They may not know what it is even - the truth, a teacher, a better kind of wine, but they want...they want...they want...they are not satisfied and sometimes they think it is something in the world that they want or true love.

Rick: Everybody wants something. I mean everybody in the world is looking for fulfillment but that does not mean everybody has had a Kundalini awakening. This is a deeper level and it is more subtle and fundamental. It is not just I want money or I want pleasure. It is more like a sense of I don't really belong here. You know, I am a stranger in a strange land. I don't fit in that kind of a thing.

Joan: Exactly, that to a person; people with Kundalini process will say from childhood I didn't fit in, I was strange in some way, people didn't understand me, I felt like a misfit, and some people actually have special talents as little children. Not just artistic talents or you can also have a talent for management or organization, less frills kinds of talents rather than tap dancing. You can just file things in a very orderly way.

Rick: Can we generalize to say that gifted people are likely to have had or come in with Kundalini awakening and somebody like Mozart is probably quite Kundalini enlivened?

Joan: I would say Mozart, yes, but not everyone with special skills has Kundalini process because the special talents, abilities and powers come from brain center activation. They are the petals of Sahasrara, the Thousand-Petaled lotus and when these are opened or activated there may be a special ability that comes forth, but these can be harvested without any Kundalini process through occult formulas, methods. There are ways to just get the gifts without involving spirituality. So it is very tricky when people think oh my god this person has so many siddhis and they know what I am thinking and predict the future and there is a charisma and power about them. It might just be brain center activation.

Rick: So their Kundalini could very well be just sitting down there in the root chakra....

Joan: If they are like a wizard rather than a saint they could have wizardly ways and just activate the powers. You can also have wizardly ways and Kundalini process that is not sufficiently elevated. And actual saints and sages also have powers. So it takes a lot of discernment. So powers are not enough to judge - is this person enlightened or realized or spiritual teacher. Some spiritual teachers manifest hardly any siddhis, but they are there. They are present. They are in truth in reality. You can feel it.

Rick: Yes, you can feel it.

Joan: It is not flashy; it's deep.

Rick: And many of them could be displaying siddhis, but they ...

Joan: They ought to sometimes...

Rick: They don't flaunt it. They just don't want it.

Joan: Exactly. If god says, do it, then it'll happen, because at that level ahankara is not making the decisions, the ego the owner is gone. They are the feather on the breath of goddess Hildegard of Bingen says and they just go in the way of Brahman.

Rick: Okay so many things you keep saying that just stimulate questions and there are so many things to ask you. So one thing that came to mind – two things here, but the first is that – you said the person could have Kundalini awakening in process over lifetimes. So obviously it is not something that is necessarily going to come to fruition over five years of practice or something, it could be lifetime after lifetime that it is steadily progressing, right?

Joan: Yes or one can stay at the same level for many lifetimes simply because they cannot find the way to make true spiritual progress or they are too tempted by rajas and tamas to get overly active with mind and senses and distracted and use the benefits of their rising to make their life better rather than using it for spiritual advancement.

Rick: Can Kundalini regress? Like you get it up to the heart chakra in one lifetime and next thing you know you lose that and it goes back down again or something.

Joan: There are certain kinds of rising that fluctuate. So it is not that they actually regress but they do go up and down within a particular nadi or subtle energy channel, tube.

Rick: And then there are other ones which once they reach a certain stage could not go back down.

Joan: They don't go beyond again, like through sushumna to throat chakra – will stay at throat chakra and not go down, it will go up.

Rick: I see...

Joan: That's a stable rising...

Rick: Stay there or go up, it is not going to go down.

Joan: It's not going to go down again. Right.

Rick: I first started having Kundalini symptoms in about 1970 after one-month meditation course, and I knew what they were, so it was okay. It didn't freak me out. I mean there were spontaneous movements like that and weird grimacing in my face sometimes and I thought okay, oh! this is cool, something good is happening, because I sort of had that training already, but I would by no means consider my process complete. I am sure it isn't...so you know it has been 45 years and this is still an ongoing thing. And you are talking about also you can have real interesting things like sometimes I have this experience that I feel like there is a chick picking its way out of an egg in my third eye center area.

Joan: I hope she seek seeds...

Rick: It feels like it, it feels like there is little chick and sometimes showers a bliss down the scalp and all this stuff, but it is a work in progress I mean, so I am just saying – lets not talk about my own experiences which aren't actually that significant compared to the most people I interview but just to indicate that this can be a lifetime process and you have to be patient and tolerant.

Joan: Yes, and there are ways to accelerate the process as well and that is what Kundalini Vidya specializes in. It is not just a theoretical frame that describes stages of spiritual development, although that certainly is there, and ways to determine where someone is on that continual, but there are also methods relevant for an individual based on who they are, what their karmic bag is like and what kind of Kundalini process or kind of rising they have.

Rick: So if just about anybody lets say who is listening to this interview and felt motivated to do so were to come to your center in Tennessee which we will talk more about later – do you have sort of an approach which kind of diagnoses them in a way and determines pretty accurately where they are at in terms of their Kundalini awakening and so far as it is progressed and then after having determined that you are able to prescribe specific practices or techniques or something to keep it going in right direction?

Joan: Yes that is our specialty. We request the applicants write their three history, which is their personal history, their health history and their spiritual history based on an outline of items that I made and so they tell their story. And from contemplating that information that the person shares in their own words and sort of being with that person in that way – reading between lines and awareness of what is going on with them on the level of their Kundalini process becomes clear. And in that way we give an assessment.

Rick: So you are saying that to a certain extent the assessment is a result of not only your knowledge background but your cognitive or intuitive ability.

Joan: Well, Swamiji told me early on, mom if you use your mind it will never work. So go beyond mind to know – way of knowing. That is use both to understand what kind of process the person has and to determine which practices will be the right match for them at that point in their development. I also have wonderful training from Swamiji, so it is not like a psychic reading, it is beyond mind.

Rick: Is he still alive?

Joan: He is...

Rick: He is in India or Tennessee?

Joan: He is in India. He lives in Rishikesh. He is 85 years old now.

He has retired mainly from working in America, but he still does some work in India with Europeans. That's how he simplified his life at this point.

Rick: Little bit later we will talk about some of these practices specifically if we may and give people kind of idea what you would prescribe to them, but I want to just keep going through other things first. But also as we go along if there is anything in particular that you really feel like talking about – don't wait for my questions, just bring it in and we will talk about it.

But there is something you said about 10 minutes ago that I wanted to comment on which is that I used to notice – I have seen this happen to lot of other people that when I was on long meditation course – something for six weeks, six months, it is very delicate in a way and even when I used to teach TM and would have 25 people in a day that you would be teaching 12 hours all day along one-by-one, by the end of that there will be such a kind of intensity or back to these long meditation courses there will be kind of an intensity that would build up and you had to be very careful least your senses just run a muck like it felt like going in a town and having a pizza in the middle of long meditation course.

Joan: Ricochet...kind of...

Rick: Yes, it is sort of like the deeper you got in a way, you had to be more disciplined and more careful, otherwise there is sort of energy built up, and I had one experience where I had to leave one of those courses abruptly in the middle of quite long meditation practice and it took me months and months to get balanced and integrated again. I felt sort of like that Star Trek thing where they get beamed up and it didn't quite work properly and they are not told totally beamed, you know.

Joan: Aha, molecules are missing...

Rick: Yes, something like that, there is a sort of disconnection thing going on. And I don't know what it was you said early that reminded me of this, but something about the necessity of sort of a disciplined life and healthy lifestyle and spiritual lifestyle if Kundalini process is in progress and you cannot just do anything you feel like doing.

Joan: And sometimes interventions that might seem to the mind or senses as intriguing or fascinating or wow that is really powerful, I am going to jump into that might be too much for a person's system at a given time. So you have to be very discerning and really tune in deep, deep, deep and not get enthralled with some of the interesting things that are available but to truly just follow that quiet inner voice of the Holy Spirit who only wants spiritual development and even so the vehicle must be prepared. The prana vitality must be developed and maintained. And the mind must be trained to not be dull or restless or fluctuate between the two, but really to be one-pointed to be able to concentrate on one thing and that can eventually flow into a meditative state. So to do that we have to work very consciously to create a sattvic environment in our gross material setting, in our

work and family and interpersonal life, in our emotional life, in our entertainment and habits. So spiritual life is one choice after another. Do I want this exciting or pleasurable whatever or do I want to go clearer, more still, more inward to the source? To be a true sincere spiritual seeker is not an easy thing. And Americans perhaps in particular are accustomed to – they want quick, so they may be more attracted to modalities that promise a quicker kind of thing that doesn't require a whole lot of effort, but even if you get somewhat quick – some kind of result to maintain it all the great spiritual tradition say that you have to have a container and develop your vessel so that it is strong and clear and capable. Basically it is the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, and if the tabernacle is tethered, difficulties happen.

Rick: Yes, you cannot pour new wine into old wineskins.

Joan: There you go.

Rick: I think this is important point we should dwell on this for few more minutes, because I don't think it is quite emphasized enough in spiritual circles. You know, there is not a lot of awareness of the notion that the body and the nervous system are instruments through which realization is attained and that you have to take care of the instrument. I mean that was something I kind of – I mean I have always been staler in that regard, but when I was 18 and still doing drugs I had this realization one night, I was sitting in my bed on LSD trip and I thought I am stuck in this body, and if I damage it I am going to be stuck in the damaged body. So I said that's it, I am going to stop taking drugs and learn to meditate, kind of clean up my act...

Joan: That's Divine guidance. You had a knowing. This is teaching me something about an altered way of looking at reality, but ultimately I feel it is probably not truly good for me in the long run and for my spiritual life.

Rick: Speaking about drugs – what do you think about LSD, Ayahuasca all the rage these days. People are all flying down to Peru to take Ayahuasca trips. Have you dealt with people who have done that and have you seen any positive outcomes or is it mixed results sometimes or ...?

Joan: It depends on the individual. I have seen some positive outcomes in that, well, they say with LSD your head does not come down in the same place and you have a true experience of a totally different way of perceiving what you thought was real and you understand like cultural relativity, you understand states of consciousness relativity and there are lots of different ways of being in reality. So that lasts and that's a paradigm buster.

Rick: Yes.

Joan: You can't remain a gross materialist, a gross analytical rationalist having had that direct experience. You know there is more going on than meets the eye. However, this glimpse is risky. Some people don't make it past their first trip.

Rick: Yes.

Joan: They are delicately poised and particularly because some people do it and particularly because people with deflected rising as we call it which are the unstable rising are more at risk than others and young people don't know am I at risk for a psychotic break or do I have deflected rising and this might whack-out my subtle system more than it would my friends. They are just all kinds of possible negative results plus many of the sacred medicine no matter how purified and careful setting and all of that there still may be toxins that build up in Ajna or in the brain centers and they have to be cleared out later and some also affect the solar center so there are consequences.

Rick: Yes, I have sort of been thinking that they should legalize marijuana because it is crazy that all these people are getting thrown in jail and penalized for something that everybody is just going to try to do anyway, but I wonder what the social ramifications of that will be in the long term.

Joan: Well, we are running that experiment, we will find out. They haven't sufficiently studied these sacred herbs but the yogis in India, some of them of course use bhang which is ayurvedically prepared to be pure even so when Swamiji was a young man and some of his fellow young swami said, oh you will get a deeper meditation and an elder called him over and said, son, no-no, even well-prepared bhang still leaves residue in Ajna and your brain gets accustomed to using that to get beyond and you don't want any crutches, you want to be able to do it autonomously on your own.

Rick: And some of those sadhus are just stoners that sit around and collect alms and smoke dope all day, they are not necessarily...

Joan: That happens too.

Rick: It's funny. Here in Fairfield, Johns Hopkins is putting quarter page ads in local paper looking for long-term meditators who would like to participate in experiments using Psilocybin. I wonder if anybody is responding to the ads but you know, I do know of cases of people who have been meditating a long time and then think - what the heck, I am going to try some drug or something and end up probably regretting it, you know it doesn't go so well.

Joan: I prefer to err on the conservative side and why risk it.

Rick: They are tempted because they hear these stories of all kinds of breakthroughs and progress and resolutions and some people they have been doing spiritual practice for long time and they think I am kind of stuck, I am not getting anywhere anymore, maybe I should try this.

Joan: Roll the dice.

Rick: So what you would say then is with your approach and this can actually segue into something little different here. With your approach, you know it is a safety first approach and

Joan: Sattvic gentle spiritual practices, not the exciting intense practices.

Rick: Yes, speaking of intense practices, I know again of people who sort of started to do a lot of intense pranayama or something hoping to ...and gotten into the trouble...

Joan: Too much may be too much...gentle sattvic and a good match for the person's system.

Rick: Yes. Oh! you have actually sort of covered the stuff that I was going to just segue into which is that Kundalini sometimes has a bad reputation because so many people have so much difficulty with it.

Joan: The thing is the word has become redefined in the modern west. The original spiritual meaning, the forth meaning of Kundalini which is that it is the divine within and that as a whole spiritual process is not understood and the spiritual emergency, the dire examples of wild Kundalini experience are basically – they have come to define the whole. They are just a tiny part of the whole continuum of Kundalini experiences, but someone says oh that's Kundalini, you automatically sort of think according to the way the word is used now that it means really troublesome and may be dangerous and may be debilitating experience. That is not at all the traditional definition of Kundalini. So I always capitalize the word Kundalini to indicate that it is name of God, that it is Divine, that it is sacred and holy and then it is not a mere wild energy. When I am using Kundalini in the standard secular way that it is used, I use lower case k just to show the difference.

Rick: I think you would say in many cases the progress of Kundalini can be very undramatic, almost unnoticeable.

Joan: Absolutely.

Rick: There is a spiritual progress taking place, even varying profound degrees of awakening, but there is not a lot of firework.

Joan: Exactly. And that's the healthier examples on the people who are really trying to create a sattvic, virtuous, healthy spiritually focussed way of living, thinking and being. Their processes generally are easier. And the kind of processes that would be termed as spiritual emergency or Kundalini crisis that needs treatment to subdue it and just make it go away. Those kinds of much more dramatic manifestations, often people in those circumstances are so frightened and so debilitated by this big experience. They may not even have a spiritual urge. One person told me I didn't do anything spiritual to make this happen. I certainly don't intend to do anything spiritual to make it go away, just fix it. There was nothing I could do for her.

Rick: Because you needed to give her something spiritual.

Joan: The only solution is a spiritual solution.

Rick: Right.

Joan: And if the person is not willing to embrace a spiritual orientation, spiritual perspective, spiritual practices and really make changes, if someone is not willing to change, progress in spiritual life is not possible. One has to admit there are improvements I can make, I am blocking myself here, I am distracting myself there. So in our work, we specialize in sincere, dedicated spiritual seekers who are willing to do the work, willing to do regular spiritual practice, willing to follow the yamas and niyamas, the values and virtues that all the great spiritual traditions have in some word or another and to open to the workings of the Divine and allow it to happen and get their preferences out of the way and get their lower interpretations out of the way, get their ego structure out of the way and let it unfold and to do it - it takes to keep prana vital and that means don't overwork, eat good food, take rest when you need it. Do your dharma, but do it in a way that really fulfills your life calling and destiny, you know family responsibilities but doesn't exhaust you because if your prana vitality is depleted you cannot make spiritual progress. Likewise, if your mind is scattered and attached and full of desires you can't keep it one-pointed and focussed and you won't make spiritual progress. These are prerequisites, and they are required. Sometimes we get calls from people who are just in this wild moment of very difficult Kundalini process and yes, it is Kundalini process but know our service doesn't address that kind of experience. We are not an ER for Kundalini emergencies. We are not a hotline where people just call up and tell their stories which are frightening and confusing them.

Rick: Let's say someone who is having a frightening wild experience, you are not going to solve the former with the phone, but could you say to them well, come on down and spend a week with us and we will be able to kind of get you more on the right track.

Joan: You know it depends on the person and often when they are in that intense and dramatic time they are not ready for what we have to offer...

Rick: But what you are going to be able to do will be lot better than the local ER that's for sure.

Joan: We are not really designed to deal with urgent emergencies.

Rick: Okay.

Joan: There is a lot a person in such a circumstance can do on their own and I list some of those things in the back of Kundalini Vidya, just very simple things like find the right good nutritious balanced diet that your particular systems needs. Rest. Pray. Find a spiritual orientation that makes sense to you. Relax into the process. Reframe it. Know that this is a sacred unfolding and that it is not of the devil. You are not being attacked and it is not going to destroy you. But until the prana system is more vitalized they would not be ready and until they are really motivated by spiritual yearning rather than urgent symptom removal - they won't be ready for what PKYC does. We are for serious spiritual seekers. There is by the way still, I believe, a spiritual emergence network, hotline.

Rick: Yes. I have heard of that.

Joan: That can refer people to counselors and practitioners that might be able to help them with some of the symptom removal. It may not necessarily address improving their Kundalini process, but it may be able to ameliorate some of the intensity of some of the symptoms. But really the main thing is to accept that this is spiritual process and be practical in taking care of yourself as you were a tiny baby to make the best of what is happening.

Rick: I know some people - spiritual teachers - whom I respect a lot and consider quite advanced and who are clear as a bell and who still eat meat.

Joan: The Dalai Lama is carnivorous atheist, and he is fabulous.

Rick: There you go. So you wouldn't correlate...

Joan: Tibetan Buddhist eat meat and they believe in no-self.

Rick: So you can't draw a correlation there at all.

Joan: Jesus ate fish.

Rick: Yeah, Buddha died from eating rancid pork.

Okay, because you had been mentioning pure diet and all that stuff, so I was wondering if...

Joan: I said correct diet for one's constitution. If your DNA strain has been Northern European forever there has probably never been a successful vegetarian in your lineage.

Rick: That's an interesting point.

And so attempting to make an abrupt dietary change to vegetarianism or something – I mean I know plenty of vegetarians who don't look terribly healthy and having all kinds of problems...and well, actually that leads us to another thing. I think I saw in your book at some place there are lot of diseases like fibromyalgia, migraines and lot of things might actually be related in some way to Kundalini issues.

Joan: You know an unstable Kundalini process or one that is intensely stuck strains the entire subtle body system and when the subtle body system is strained and the vayus which are the pranas flowing in a way that is just trying to get the Kundalini process unstuck and pushing and urging and sort of banging on the walls, the whole system is out of balance and strained and the prana system is the basis for the physical system as light turns into waves and waves turns into particles, it manifests on the gross, so if something is really out of whack in the subtle level it can manifest on the physical and also karmically there can be difficulties in the Kundalini process and karmically that person just has diagnoses on top of that.

Rick: You think there is an optimum age for spiritual progress and we could bring Kundalini into the question and just as it is with athletics for instance and that after a certain age your ability to progress is going to steadily diminish?

Joan: Depends on the individual again and the karmic timing for the ripening of their yearning and their focus on spiritual life is what is about for me and that's it. That's my prime directive.

The median age for people coming to us is 53. We got people in their 20s all the way through their 80s who have successfully progressed. But you know in people's 50s once they have done their career thing, their kids are launched enough, there is a turning inward, and Jung said really what's the point of working with someone for deep analytical work until they are 40, anyway they don't understand themselves well enough. They haven't had enough life experience to really be clear on their values and their purpose and who they are. So to go deeply into who am I some people are precocious and they get it very early on. Other people they have to do these second phase of life in Vedic way and have their career and family and get established then they can look more inward to their spiritual needs.

Rick: And you know some people are precocious and they get it very early on and go out and become teachers and probably would be better off maturing for another decade or so before embarking on that responsibility.

Joan: You know there is something to be said for a seclusion time either definitely in a given day or for a certain period of time, because the inner work cannot be bypassed. The unloading of the subconscious, the emptying of the karmic bag which only happens with this gentle tipping point turning point – the sacred shift of getting to Makara point which is at the top of sushumna nadi in the upper Ajna chakra. When that sacred shift happens, it is like popping the cork on the chitta and the unconscious material can flow forth with a simultaneous establishment of objectivity and discernment and non attachment, so you are not identifying with material and it can flow forth, but this takes a lot of time for just even the first big clearing. Then when one gets into the actual stages of Samadhi which are still dualistic, the refined purification of the baseline, sort of the silt and algae at the bottom of lake of mind, you have thrown out the tin cans in the old _____. Your personal history.... I got the slide show of my life and the little snippets of boyhood that's emptied out but that silt at the bottom which is character logical, preverbal, ancient in our how many lifetimes and so much who we have become that it's almost invisible to us, it is like a fish being aware of water. It is just what we live in – it's our world view – it's our interpretative filter. To empty that out – oh my god, it is painful, the ego fights against it and ego is tricky-tricky-tricky. It doesn't want to be unplugged. It is like Hal in "2001, A Space Odyssey".

Rick: Dave, stop Dave...

Joan: Aha...it seems so sweet.

Rick: Don't do that Dave...

(Laughter)

Joan: And it will kill Dave... It just wants to survive. It knows the jig is up and that it will cease to be. It has to cease to be. And all of that stuff has to be emptied out for truly one to be able to be one-with-one. There can't be anything in between. The individual has to have the vitality and one-pointedness and nonattachment and discernment to expand, expand, expand until finally it is one-with-the-one, no separation, and there is only one that is all there is.

Rick: What you need is to open up a gold mine of stuff we can talk about. I mean the whole thing you just went through in the last couple of minutes is amazing. Let's elaborate on it. You were actually going to say one more thing, but I am just really thrilled with what you just said.

Joan: I can imagine knowing the types of Kundalini processes that there are sometimes very rarely this merging the individual self with universal self can happen quickly, but even after that experience the hard work of emptying out the contents of the chitta and the disengagement of the ahankara and training of the manas which is the senses and desires that work still has to be done. So the whole spiritual bypass which maybe westerners – if they want the faster way they imagine they can just jump over the level of mind. Yes, I am going to go straight hop over chitta into Buddhi and bask in the light of the one. But chitta will bite you at some point and it will be attended to, it will pull you down if you don't face it.

Rick: I think Maharishi Mahesh Yogi said that at one time it is possible to have some kind of awakening that is genuine, but if you really haven't cleaned up a lot of stuff then you are going to have a lot to deal with; he didn't say this but that the sheet can really hit the fan a lot faster and more uncomfortably than it would have if you had been able to work more progressively through it before that awakening.

Joan: This is why the spiritual path cross-culturally inter-spiritually starts with an ethical code, starts with virtue. And they get all this old religion words activated and they think you know it's all good. It is not all good. Some stuff is harmful to the subtle system. Some stuff is distracting and depleting. So choices every minute, every day, there are choices – it makes a difference.

Rick: Let's keep talking about that but let's also – you know you talked about getting to the Makara point then the levels above that.

Joan: Makara is the crocodile animal in the second chakra that will pull you under into desire water element. Makara is the full moon experience of catching the gap between thoughts and having the first true glimpse of beyond mind – Buddhi.

Rick: It is funny, because I feel that in a way when I first learnt to meditate almost from really literally from day 1, I had such a glimpse but then again there had been decades of house cleaning necessary after that. So is it possible to have a glimpse right from the start like that.

Joan: Yes, in fact there are methods that sort of specialize in giving a glimpse of experience and it can be inspiring and motivating and it's a sneak preview of more to come...

Rick: Good way to put it...

Joan: And so it keeps you practicing, because you know this is true, this is real, this can happen again.

Rick: And it does, I mean in a way those glimpses have been almost daily all these decades but never with the degree of clarity that is possible, but always sort of like dive in, soak it up, come out into activity integrated and just there is this continual cycle and refinement and what not. So it is a sort of like in a way the goal is all along the path.

Joan: The goal is as the advaitans know ever present, because it is beyond time and space, atman is here now, yes, and mind is in way. So mind makes the duality. It is the maya factory. And it produces all of this veils and obstacles that keep us from realizing we already are one with the one. But if we are one with the one and don't have a direct experience of it, it is just theoretical. So we have to eliminate the veils, get through the koshas, particularly mind is the great barrier – reef and that's why all of these recommendations around lifestyle and thought and the wonderful grace and blessing of glimpses of light or insights of truth keep us going, keep us motivated, so that we will want to continue on the spiritual path if not even in the slump when we lose our self-confidence and we go, ah! What's the use of doing spiritual practice, meditation is just boring and it is just the same old stuff going by and am I really making any progress? Well, I have got this I got to get done and that I got to get it done and we get convinced my lower mind to do less practice, which is why at least continuing to

think about the primary purpose of life and to remember those wonderful moments of grace and truth, the glimpses of reality that we have been given. Actually make a list of them, so that when in doubt you can go – yes, I had that true glimpse experience, its real, there is more or if there is a visage of a great holy one then you just look at the blessed face and you know the Divine is shining through – the one is presently radiating from the core, the source of that vessel. That embodied being is living from the source. That’s the devotion.

Rick: That’s beautiful. And there are living examples of what’s possible.

Joan: Indeed and even the ones who are no longer in the body their photographs still convey this wonderfully, Anandamoyi Ma...

Rick: Sure...

Joan: And...

Rick: Ramana Maharshi...

Joan: Ramana, yes, and Sri Ramakrishna and even the death mask of Saint John of the Cross, oh my God, his face is just so beautiful.

Rick: Beautiful.

Joan: But you can get this from scripture also, it depends. I’m a feeling type who is trained to be a thinking type. There are people who are naturally thinking types. Vivekananda said, that in the spiritual path the heart of a thinking type is a feeling type – is a devotee and the core of a bhakta of a devotee is a gnani, the thinking type and they come together as do all the pairs of opposites, the synthesis occurs. So the advaitin who hopefully would be studying the Upanishads because that is what gnani do is study scripture, meditate, contemplate, hear the truth, think about the truth, go inside and have experience of the truth. This too is a path that gives glimpses and insights and you follow like bread crumbs. These wonderful gifts of grace that come from truth until you get closer and closer to the source.

Rick: Beautiful. And to perhaps summarize everything you have just been saying, “seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all else should be added unto thee”. It’s a matter of what you put your attention, or you know seek and you shall find that phrase that if you just keep your attention on this stuff and act accordingly...

Joan: That’s right. That also is a practice. Even if you can’t get yourself to do actual practices, if your heart is still yearning, if your mind is still trying to figure it out that also is a practice.

Rick: I have seen that a lot with people. It’s sort of like when they have that yearning, the Divine hears it and answers the call.

Joan: Yes that which is seeking is that which is being sought – St. Augustine.

Rick: There are some gurus who use the phrase – take one step toward me and I will take thousand steps toward you. I think the same could be said of probably Kundalini Shakti or the Divine intelligence itself - that if you have that intention sincerely, you will be supported and met along your way.

Joan: Yes, it is answered. It is reciprocal.

Rick: Right. So I think maybe little lesson in what we are saying just now is - it is not a dumb mechanistic universe, it is a divine intelligent universe, and you are not alone, and if you have the sincere desire for higher

possibilities then just enliven that whatever extent you can and your efforts which may even be effortless but whatever you give to it will be rewarded, maybe not immediately but it will be rewarded.

Joan: That's a thing...patience is very important and that's where we get weary and we want bigger results, faster results, sure results but it is one baby step at a time often for quite a while and then there is tipping point and the thing is you have to really tune in to that inner discernment because if you are following a method that isn't the right match for you, you can follow and follow and follow and it's not going to yield but you are hoping for, because it is not the right match. So just blind faith or by god this is what I picked and stick in with it. Sometimes jumping ship if the ship is not going or not your style of ship sometimes one has to jump ship because the rivers go into the ocean no matter what ship you are on. The ship has to match you.

Rick: To use a similar metaphor. Yesterday I flew from Hartford and one plane went from Hartford – well, came from Marlborough and we drove to Hartford and then a plane took me to Chicago and another plane took me to Moline and then I drove home, so you have to somehow take the appropriate vehicle for each stage.

Joan: That's right. That's right. It might work for this phase and not for this phase.

Rick: And sometimes people have guilt around that kind of thing. Well, this has been my teacher and I have been disloyal if I change teachers or anything, but I don't know my attitude has been gratitude for every step of the way and an openness to what is needed.

Joan: That's right, because it is the bigger picture. It is about the individual soul merging with universal soul and that is independent of religion or teacher. It is spirit-to-spirit.

Rick: And the thing may be for some people it might be appropriate and fruitful for them to stay with one teacher all the way and in other cases its like the education process where we have one teacher in third grade, another teacher in fourth grade, and then other teachers in college, you know we kind of follow along.

Joan: There has to go a good reason – for switching.

Rick: Yes, you don't want to be dilettante.

Joan: Exactly. You want to go for the depth, not for the breadth at a certain point. Get the overview, but then pick a path that you really resonate with that you have studied and your discernment says this is a true path, this is a true teacher, there is a natural teacher. And I really resonate and I can benefit and I am going for the depth with this one.

Rick: In your own case you have devoted your life to this sort of thing. You got married when you were young, your husband died that was devastating then you kind of devoted your life and he was a spiritual person also and you guys were already doing yoga and stuff together and you have devoted your life to this sort of things now for decades. In talking to you and reading your books I feel like you are a good example of the value of dedicating one's life to spiritual development.

Joan: Hope to be.

Rick: That's a beautiful humble thing to say. Lot of times people don't like to talk about their level of spiritual development, other people are very open about it and you have a vast body of knowledge here – to what extent you feel like you have progressed as a result of all this – in terms of stages of awakening relative to what stages are possible?

Joan: I am not done yet; I can tell you that.

Rick: Is anybody?

Joan: I think so, I think it is rare.

Rick: It is rare. Like the Indian fellow that you mentioned would he be considered done? Your teacher....

Joan: Swamiji?

Rick: Yes.

Joan: Yes, I believe he has. Yes. And Anandamayi Ma.

Rick: Sure.

Joan: There are great saints and sages from all around the world all different years who are realized. Their autobiographical writing conveys it. It comes off the page as a living presence still. I have been very fortunate to have had some very good spiritual education. I was brought up in religious family. I got 12 years of Catholic schooling and I had good nuns and priest, no problems, I was very fortunate in that and we were taught theology and critical thinking and how to be with scripture in a way that it comes forth and the importance of virtue and the examination of conscience to be self-aware of what am I doing that is helping my spiritual life, what's off the mark. Then it all fell apart shockingly to me on senior retreat, it just sort of collapsed and didn't make sense. It was really difficult. My whole culture was catholic and everybody I knew was catholic and it didn't make sense to me anymore. So it was the end of the 60s also synchronistically, so I did a lot of exploring of what is the world if it is not coming through this little subculture that's all I have ever known. So I examined the secular world. Fortunately, that didn't last all that long, shortly out of college I found a really good yoga class with a spiritual orientation using gentle asana, teaching the yamas and niyamas, gentle pranayama and basic mantra meditation. It was in the Sivananda lineage. And I practiced that and realized there was a philosophy behind it. So I studied the yoga sutra, I started studying Vedanta, so by the time I met Swamiji in 1986 synchronistically I finally got a free trip to India, somebody needed a meditation teacher on a tour and so I got this wonderful three-week tour all around India and landed in Rishikesh and stayed behind to do my own practice and Swamiji was coming and going to teach some Sanskrit and I felt very stuck in my process and he was clearly no ordinary swami and I finally asked him for help and he gave me particular practices, explained them to me and my process just started to unfold really beautifully a wonderful shift opened for me. So I came back to America.

Rick: Wonderful shift...Can you just elaborate on what the wonderful shift was?

Joan: Well, in Kundalini Vidya it is called Makara point. I reached Makara through sushumna. I already had rising through sushumna nadi. There are six Shakti nadis, three are very rare, mainly the three that Shakti can enter are Vajra, Saraswati and Sushumna. Vajra and Saraswati are unstable and called deflected.

Rick: And these are pathways from the base chakra to the top. Right?

Joan: Yes. And I came in with the rising through the Sushumna nadi to the heart level.

Rick: Came into this life...

Joan: Came into this lifetime, yes, with the heart chakra rising through Sushumna nadi, which is what any good organized religion should be able to give a person, a rising through Sushumna to heart chakra, so lots of church ladies have heart chakra risings, but one needs more than the standard religious practices to get beyond that. So I practiced Raja Yoga for 10 years by the time I met Swamiji and I had meditated and studied the philosophies,

but the particular practices that he gave me hit my subtle system in a different way so that the vayus were quickly trained to do something different than they did with just the standard two dozen asanas and half dozen pranayams.

Rick: Better define Vayus?

Joan: Vayus are the ways the prana operates. Each chakra has a vayu particular to it and an element particular to it. So the vayus generally stay in their own location at the chakra that is their seat but in spiritual practices they are trained to combine and elevate, so that they leave the area in which they normally function for purposes of keeping life functions operating, digestion, respirations and so forth because they animate the corpus. So for spiritual improvement the vayus have to be trained through spiritual technology, spiritual practices, to do something different than they would ordinarily do, and this is to be done gently, not in a big, fast, hard, dramatic way that would be rajasic intervention. Spiritual intervention should be sattvic. So not to say they can't feel intense but they are gently intense. So these practices I could feel I already had symptoms, signs of the Kundalini process. There was a lot of heat generating from the chest upward, my heart would flutter and hop and spin. I actually went to a cardiologist complaining of a spinning heart, - the look he gave me – we did the sonogram and he concluded I had a heart like a horse and hearts don't spin. But it did feel spinning, because the prana vayu was spinning in the heart chakra and that is what I was feeling because people with risings can feel the movement of the vayus, of the prana. So I knew there was something happening. When I started doing these practices, I had one night of intense kriyas and I just was basically rolling in different ways all over the floor. It was sort of a shaking out. Hardly sounds gentle but it was quite natural and comfortable actually. It just felt like a good stretch like you might do when you wake up.

Pranayamas became automatic. So that there was spontaneous retention. There was spontaneous very gentle bhastrika like that.

Rick: I get that a lot when I meditate.

Joan: It's purification and vitalization. Because I had process stuck at heart chakra, it felt when I did particular practice like there was a stiletto in my heart. It was very painful. But I knew it was in the energy system, because as I soon as I stopped that particular practice the pain went away and every time I did it, it came back, so I knew it was working on an obstacle. So any rate, I had tremendous grace and blessing and help, so one night Swamiji set me to meditate and there was an opening and a vision and I just went up into white light that was illuminating and I was gone and then at some point I came back, so my Makara experience was more definite than many. I think partly because I had farther to go and partly because Swamiji was there and his Great Master was there and initiated me at the same time.

Rick: On the subtle level or something...

Joan: On the celestial level. So my particular story is a different one. Because Swamiji then started teaching me Kundalini Vidya then later started coming to America once my process developed enough that he could teach me more. I had to have the experience before he would fill in more about the theory, so it wouldn't sort of be like a self-fulfilling idea, so once I described the experience then he would take me to the scripture and show me and then later when he started coming to America like eight years later and people started coming for our service I would learn from each individual more and more about Kundalini Vidya, because I could see the case study. I knew their history. I saw them get to Makara. I heard their experiences that they had post Makara and then as years went by and we were in regular contact with ongoing consultations for spiritual direction, they came back for more retreats and we started providing more spiritual education. I could see the trajectory and I could see the difficulties people got themselves into and I could see how practices yielded different things with different people and Swamiji all the while was explaining this to me.

Rick: Fantastic education.

Joan: Fabulous education. Our lineage teaches one person at a time in this way because he was teaching me to be able to be a practitioner.

Rick: I read that in your book and is not that a bit risky, what if something had happened to you like that would break the lineage.

Joan: Lineage is in-charge of itself and its destiny.

Rick: So you are training some person now?

Joan: Swamiji is now training another person for his work in India and he has longed me to be responsible for the work in America.

Rick: So Makara, you mentioned it number of times, as I understand it from your book, it is sort of upper level of the sixth chakra, right?

Joan: Yes.

Rick: And it is a stable point, having reached which you are not going to drop back again.

Joan: Exactly.

Rick: So I want to go into this little bit more with you, but there are a lot of teachers, lot of gurus who have sort of given gurus a bad name by seemingly being a very awake, enlightened person and then doing bad things, culturally considered to be bad or immoral or reprehensible in some way.

Joan: And so would the great spiritual traditions...

Rick: So do you think that such people could have reached Makara and then you can still have moral irregularities that need to be worked out or do you think that they are probably not as enlightened as they and their followers might think they are or were.

Joan: You know there are lots of varieties of Kundalini experience. And with the deflected rising a lot of the brain centers are activated automatically and remember that these are unstable rising, they don't even touch Makara because Makara is the top of sushumna and those risings have to be diverted into sushumna for a person to get to Makara and in order to access the upper routes to Bindu and Para Bindu you have to bypass go through Makara point, but you can get lot of brain center stimulation, lot of siddhis, lot of charisma without Makara and lower brow which is just short of Makara there is a clairvoyance window that can open, so you can get a lot of siddhis in that way too, and that is stable rising and people are very bright, very insightful with that kind of rising. They got some special but there is a possibility for ego aggrandizement and temptation at that level and there can be siddhis with temptation. But also even at Makara you are not home free...

Rick: And you still have ego aggrandizement, temptation at Makara, but you are not going to fall back from Makara, so you got this stable state from which you can still be a schmuck? (Laughter) possible?

Joan: Yes, alas...and of course the consequences are more dire, a person at Makara because they have this wonderful blessing I think the divine expects more one could say. The stakes are higher. The subtle body takes it harder if one misbehaves post Makara, this is why again the yamas and niyamas and four prerequisites of Vedanta must be lived. One cannot be unvirtuous. There is no cultural relativity. Well, it is okay because whatever ...excuse...

Rick: This is for years has been something I have pondered, because I don't want to name names but I had always sort of come to learn or to understand that there is a correlation between higher states of consciousness and moral behavior and that if you are really up there in terms of high degree of enlightenment or awakening then you know everything you do should be a spontaneous expression of life supporting intention, you are not going to be doing anything which would harm or disillusion or hurt anyone but then I came to see so many examples to the contrary that it really confused me and I have been thinking about this and discussing with people ever since. Is there a state at which one is finally really – I guess you say yes there is a final realization and perhaps at that point one is no longer susceptible to such...

Joan: As long as one is in the body, the senses are engaged, I think through practice of virtue and adamant yearning for liberation in this lifetime people form deep grooves of virtue and they can withstand temptations much more easily but as long as one is embodied, as long as one has a mind then there is a possibility. A lot of the eastern teachers who came to the west and were brought up and trained in a very restrictive culture they come to the west and oh my goodness, the way western ladies dress and present themselves blatantly as available.

Rick: And I wouldn't just blame the ladies, because these guys have some responsibility too.

Joan: Totally, I am not just blaming, goodness, no, I am not just blaming the ladies, but I am saying that even though they were able to withstand perhaps temptation in their training time they are transported to a whole other environment and it is harder for them. Their strong habits of virtue fall prey to a different cultural setting which is my explanation for why so many of them have fallen. I am not blaming the ladies.

Rick: Could there be a legitimate scenario in which some teacher who comes from the east and really is established in a very enlightened state and who grew up in an ashram setting and living monastically but who really perhaps has what we call vasana, klesha, who has tendencies that never got worked out and who perhaps by dharma very well could have been a householder and yet because of spiritual zeal went for a monastic life and they are out there in the world interacting with young ladies and all kinds of people and obviously and they succumb to temptations but perhaps there are some kind of thing they actually need to experience that they bypassed when they were young.

Joan: Well, the saying in India is live the vows or remove the robe.

Rick: That's a good way to put it and that's a little hard if your world famous guru whoever has become accustomed to being seen in a robe.

Joan: If you are not able to live the vows you are no longer a Swami, go live the secular life and do it as virtuously as you can but don't pretend to be a priest if you are not living as a priest or a monk...

Rick: And advocating it to others as well...

Joan: Be true to the inner...It's not easy...and thus when asked the question well, how far long are you...there is a lot farther to go. I am very grateful for what I have been able to experience, but I can say with all truth but there is lot more to be dealt with and I am acutely aware of work that I have yet to do, because it gets more refined and more difficult the farther along you get.

Rick: I think that is a really good perspective and orientation and it is a perennial theme in these interviews because although I don't know all the fine details of the potential milestones I just have an intuitive conviction that the range of possible evolutionary advancement is vast and that even some of our most exemplary spiritual luminaries might not yet have traversed that whole range and there is that attitude – Amma says, it is good to

always have the attitude of a beginner. And in Zen they say beginner's mind and this sort of attitude like relative to what might be possible, I am just starting out, even though I have been at this for a lifetime.

Joan: And you know there is karmic strata as well and it can look really nice at first and you are emptying all that out and then you hit a level in your karmic stuff that is like all hell breaks loose and it was unexpected, but there you are in the thick of it all of a sudden and it has to be dealt with. You don't know it is going to come but there it is.

Rick: Interesting. Now, we have talked about Makara and you have eluded to stages above Makara and then Bindu and Para Bindu and that relates to what we have just been saying I think in terms of the range of possibilities, so can you kind of itemize and delineate a little bit, elaborate a little bit on what these various possibilities might be above Makara which again we have defined as a kind of a stable platform that once reached can't be lost but which is not the bigger one and all.

Joan: An opening...People who have no Kundalini process at all we can say they live in a gross material rational world of waking state of consciousness. People who have Kundalini process pre-Makara live in a dreaming state.

Rick: Metaphorically kind of...

Joan: Metaphorically, it's not like they are dreaming like you do at night, but that means the subtle body, the energy system and the mind are prominent for them. So it is the life of mind, it's the life of sensitivity, it's the life of ...yeah ...there is external world but what is really going on is more subtle than that and they are aware of this subtlety. And it is vast and it is fascinating and it is intriguing. When you get to Makara, there is another shift and that is to being conscious in deep sleep state which is the state of concentration going to meditation where you can catch the gap between thoughts and start to go beyond mind.

Rick: It is so interesting you mentioned that. I was going to interrupt you briefly because that also is something that I brought up in many of the interviews and there was recently a big discussion about it on Facebook that I was part of about consciousness or pure awareness during deep sleep as being a sort of earmark of a certain degree of awakening. I would let you proceed in a second, but perhaps you could elaborate on that and whether that is a sort of an absolute criterion of a certain degree of awakening or if one could be very awake and even beyond the stage you are referring to here and yet not routinely have awareness during sleep.

Joan: Every individual is different and it does not necessarily mean that while I am in bed in what a sleep researcher would say as deep sleep state that I am always conscious that happens and there is a carryover that would be internal awareness of deep sleep. It can also happen while one is meditating. But then it also carries over into I am in activity as you would say, I am externally engaged and yet I am also conscious of the deep sleep state in a sort of presence, while I am also aware of the dream time realm and clearly engaged in waking state.

Rick: That's interesting.

Joan: The states according to Mandukya Upanishad in spiritual development waking enters into dreaming, waking and dreaming enter into deep sleep, waking dreaming and deep sleep enter into turiya beyond the koshas, the sheaths.

Rick: How about this? Let me tell you my experience and see how it fits into what you just said, which is that all the time pretty much, I don't think I have awareness during sleep, although I do have a thing while I wake up and I think you know if I don't get to sleep I am going to be tired tomorrow and then I will realize - just seconds ago I was deep into a dream and I just had this feeling that I have been awake for a long time but actually I

wasn't, but another thing is that most of the time quite vividly or clearly there is a sense of as if living in a cave of being while at the same time engaged in dynamic activity and a feeling like I am not doing anything, nothing is happening. There is this pure silence and yet all this wild stuff going on, things that I am doing around me, going to an airport, dealing with this and how does that relate to what you just said.

Joan: This is a mind trained to be one-pointed. You can find the still point with mind concentrating while you are carrying on various external activities.

Rick: And you are not trying to find. It is just the condition that you are spontaneously in.

Joan: Because the mind is trained. You have trained it to be one-pointed.

Rick: Well, lot of times in meditation I feel that my mind is anything but one-pointed. I am having all kinds of thoughts; I might be thinking some song that I listened to or something which I would rather just be totally absorbed but the mind still has its noise going on. (My wife just handed me a note saying I am talking about myself too much)

(Laughter...)

I am like brining in certain experiences....

Joan: This is what marriage is for. You got a constant mirror.

Rick: Well, I am just trying to gain clear understanding of some of these experiences and place them into contacts to what you are talking about and maybe it will help other people who are listening to this who have a similar orientation.

Joan: Everyone wants to self-assess. It is not as easy as it seems. It is complicated. And sometimes one kind of rising because of the karmic material and temperament of the person and all of that it will look like something else. It's not like a personality type that you just go, "oh Myers-Briggs INFP, that's clear."

Rick: Okay, so I interrupted you. You are going through a progressive explanation...

Joan: Of the states...

Rick: Please keep going...

Joan: From waking, dreaming, deep sleep and beyond.

Rick: Stages above Makara as we go up.

Joan: So the transition from I have got some kind of initial rising, but I haven't reached Makara yet - you are living more in dream realm even while you are in activity. At Makara, this sacred shift that happens is that you are now able to access deep sleep state with awareness and this is where real mediation happens. There is a difference between I practice this kind of meditation method and I am meditating.

Joan: When you are meditating, the mind stays still.

Rick: Doesn't waver. Like a lamp that does not flicker in a windless place.

Joan: Yes. But when you are practicing the meditation method, your mind can still be dull and restless and fleeting all over the place. That you are practicing it but you are not meditating.

Rick: You are not getting anything; it is just benefiting you but you are into...

Joan: Meditation is an experience. It is also defined as a method. So people say, I meditate. Well, they practice a method, they may not actually be in the state of meditation when they do that method. So two different things. But post Makara you can meditate actually and the cork is popped, Kundalini Shakti chooses an upper route, they vary, they each have their own particular characteristics but their first big job is clear out the karmic bag of the major things then when the stages of lower Samadhi, dualistic Samadhi start happening progressively, the more refined clearing out happens. When that is cleared out enough then it is described as visarga where Shakti starts merging into Shiva, and the individual self merges into the universal self. The first experience of that is Bindu that point at the middle of the Sri Yantra beyond manifestation. It can be just a brief experience but then it recurs and one goes back, one commutes to Bindu again and again and again and then there is said to be what is called a 4-inch gap between the individual self and universal self, so the expansion of awareness increasingly feels this 4-inch gap until the individual self and universal self are one and that is Para Bindu or turiya. When that is really well established that is turiyatita beyond turiya, and that is jeevanmukta who is in all four states waking, dreaming, deep sleep and beyond in turiya and has brought turiya back up into the waking state, so that they are simultaneously in all four states 24x7 liberated in the body.

Rick: Let me throw a question here. My understanding of turiyatita was always that it is not – I am not arguing with them – I am just saying this is juxtaposing what I had always understood with what you just said is that it is not here in all four states simultaneously but you are always in turiya fourth state, pure consciousness whether you are in waking, dreaming or sleeping, so that those three will cycle along but there is a continuum of pure consciousness as they cycle.

Joan: The continuum of pure consciousness really starts at Bindu, at turiya and in turiyatita. There is some fluctuation. Now I am more in dreaming, now I am more in waking, but they don't go away.

Rick: Dreaming and waking.

Joan: In turiyatita, the other three states don't go away. It is a matter of now I appear to be in waking, now I appear to be in dreaming, now I appear to be in deep sleep, of course turiya permeates all of them. From the outside looking at the Jeevanmukta they appear to be waking, dreaming, sleeping, but...

Rick: But they are really in all three.

Joan: They are all three but it is a matter of degree how much obviously when they are eating and walking there is more waking activity going on, but they are also aware of things from the celestial level and from the subtle level.

Rick: Well, I was just going to say, it doesn't sound very desirable to be in all three. I mean why would you want to be in sleep and dream while you are in waking but what we just said about celestial...

Joan: I am using that words differently.

Rick: Celestial is that clarifies it...what you just said...they are aware of the celestial and subtle.

Joan: Think of it as material, subtle, causal or celestial and beyond...

Rick: There you go, now it makes sense.

Joan: Okay good.

Rick: Otherwise it is like snoring while I am eating breakfast, just doesn't make sense...

(Laughter)

So what you are saying is that one is aware of the subtle realms, while riding the subway or something you might see celestial beings on the subway and you are aware of the causal while you are in the middle of the regular worldly activities. Right? That is, we are saying.

Joan: Yes.

Rick: Okay. That makes more sense. And that does come along for many people that you know people I have interviewed for instance who just routinely see angels all around us all the time and things like that. They have that celestial perception.

Joan: Or subtle perception. It is a judgment call – is this not embodied entity, a subtle realm entity or a celestial realm entity.

Rick: And there are many gradations of subtle, right? And some of those entities you might not want to hang out with.

Joan: Exactly. Which is why it is tricky to travel around the subtle too much because there are still the pairs of opposites, there are good guys and bad guys just as there are in the material plane.

Rick: Okay. Alright. I think maybe we are not quite finished. But so you are talking about these gradations and it seems like there are many of them and eventually we get up to the Bindu point then there is a Para Bindu, have we finished or is there yet more of experience.

Joan: Jeevanmukta liberated while still in the body. That is the ultimate. But there is also person who is at Turiya and not fully liberated on an everyday basis, but at the time of death enters into the experience of one with the one and if they leave the body in that experience then they are liberated and they don't have to be reborn.

Rick: Now you referred to celestial masters a little while ago, and I think you said you received some instruction from a Celestial Master. Are celestial masters fairly common on the celestial level and are a lot of enlightened people like I have heard lot of stories of people getting guidance from Ramana Maharshi. Could he possibly become a celestial master and many other masters become that and they are continuing to work from that level and they won't take physical human rebirth again, but they are going to hang around and help us out.

Joan: I think so. I think that's sort of the Vedic version of the bodhisattva that there are great adepts and certainly Christian saints, certainly Jesus that will be with you always, even to the end of the world for the purpose of spiritual guidance and blessing and assistance. The adepts and great ones on the celestial and beyond are part of their dharma, some of them is to preserve and protect and make available the great spiritual teachings of the world, so that they never disappear and are available when they are needed and that there are human beings who are advanced enough that they can access what the great celestial ones protect and preserve, so that there is a continuity of spiritual teachings that they are not lost, they may sometimes go into repose, but when needed they come forward again for the benefit of humanity and the whole purpose of incarnated into a human body is liberation, so we need those teachings and they don't go away and the more we want them sincerely the more they come to us and the more we seek assistance the more it comes to us. This is one of the great boons of devotion to a great saint or sage and pilgrimage. That if we go to the holy places where the Divine has been present or where a great saint or sage has lived in a state of liberation or where the faithful and devoted have gone to worship, century after century after century, the Celts called them the "thin places".

When we go to these “thin places”, the celestial blessings and the presence of the holy ones and Divine assistance and inner spiritual education, it’s more readily available for our spiritual well being.

Rick: It is a beautiful explanation. I love that phrase, “thin places”. It implies permeability there. Whereas if you hang out in some kind of strip joint or bar or something, pretty thick.

Joan: Very heavy, low tamasic vibe and a lot of sex-addicted astrals wantin’ you to misbehave, don’t go there.

Rick: And of course there are Vedic conjunctions and I am sure in other traditions as well to hang out in the company of spiritual people. If you’re interested in spirituality, better hang out with spiritual people. It’s going to be conducive to it. That would also explain why you can kind of make a thin place by having a spiritual gathering of some sort.

Joan: Satsang...

Rick: Yeah, Satsang with right types of people, it makes that opening more...

Joan: Where you really bring your sattvic vibes and you get into a meditative state and you talk about spiritual topics.

Rick: Yes that kind of mutually reinforce...

Joan: It makes it nice vibe in the place...and then you keep it purified with incense and candles and sacred images and you don’t do lower vibe stuff in that particular place. That’s why it is nice to have a sadhana place in your home.

Rick: Yeah, it’s interesting. I know that when going to see Amma sometimes she has programs in hockey rinks and places, generally it’s public places that have been used for all kinds of things, but after a couple of days the whole place has been transformed.

Joan: Absolutely, she would sanctify it, very consciously sanctify it. She generates the Shakti to fill that place and then the love and upliftment of the devotees also fills the place. So it is just one big Shakti generated.

Rick: Well, we got about three pages of questions here, none of which I have asked you over the course of 2 hours 47 minutes, but I want to just throw in one question which came in from a listener – Do lower life forms - animals, some people would resent my calling them lower, but do they have Kundalini and can they get enlightened or is that something that is reserved only for human nervous systems.

Joan: I know Ramana had a cow.

Rick: That supposedly got enlightened.

Joan: But according to what I know of the Vedic perspective, domestic animals especially and beloved pets are either like on their way to or on their way back from human incarnation, and that human incarnation is sought and that you kind of go up the cascade of life forms until you have a human incarnation and that human being have the full subtle body system that is required for liberation, all the chakras, all of the nadis whereas other mammals may not have all of the chakras and nadis that are necessary to support Kundalini Shakti. So they all have purushas according to Samkhya, but their Kundalini Shakti don’t have the subtle body equipment for the liberation project.

Rick: Nor did their gross nervous system, even a crocodile has a reptilian brain, it doesn’t have a prefrontal cortex and all that stuff which presumably is necessary for the kind of awakening we are talking about.

Joan: Well, according to the neuro-theology...yes.

Rick: That's an interesting phrase, neuro-theology, I have to look into that...Okay, so let me skip all my other questions and we will do another interview one of these days and I will prepare for it more and have a whole batch of things to ask you, but let me just read this one that came in because somebody took the trouble sending it in. Linda from Boulder, Colorado asks – how can one tell if physical conditions that arise are related to Kundalini Shakti. I had my initial Kundalini awakening about 30 years ago and I have wondered since then if certain body experiences such as chronic pressure in the back of my head are related to spiritual blockage or opening. I have a strong spiritual practice including mantra chanting. Is there anything else you would recommend or is it so individual that I would need to come see you. Also thank you for Kundalini Vidya book, it's fascinating.

Joan: Thank you. It's a good question because it's discernment around and I get this question a lot, is this physical or is this process and someone who has Kundalini process lives in a body and has a subtle body along with Kundalini that is trying to finish the liberation project. So it's sometimes a hard judgment call, but if one thinks this might be a physical difficulty go check it out with the regular MD if the test is not invasive. Like when I got the sonogram for my spinning heart, I was reassured there is nothing wrong with my actual physical heart, ergo it's the vayus, it's process, and pressure in the back of the head can often happen with Kundalini process that is trying to progress upward. Pressure in the head in various places is not uncommon sign or side effect of Kundalini process.

Rick: Okay. So in Linda's case you think that answered her question or would you really need to see her in person to figure out exactly what's going on.

Joan: You know we always work with individuals. You just can't say exactly what's going on without having the three history and speaking with the individual. The three history, the assessment really is the first step in what we do other than education through like this interview or the book Kundalini Vidya. Do you always do that in person in Tennessee or you sometimes consult people over Skype.

Joan: No, we do it by phone. They mail in their three history. Once they have written them and send in photograph and such and then I give the assessment over phone.

Rick: But then to actually get more practical instruction do they have to come to Tennessee or you can do the whole thing over phone.

Joan: They do. We work in person with individual, so when I do a retreat I work with usually 2 to 5 people.

Rick: You like to keep it small.

Joan: Keep it small, keep it small. I used to work with eight people that's when Swamiji was here, but that's too much for me these days. I am trying to make my own life a little gentler.

Rick: How long these retreats last.

Joan: Two weeks. Just short of two weeks. We are small and it's not like 300 people are coming for a weekend. And one of the filters that we have because we want people who are stable in their life situation, stable enough health wise, stable enough emotionally, psychologically and really spiritually motivated. The fact that we require that you write your three history, you basically send in your story to a stranger almost and the fact that it cost a few thousand dollars to do this retreat means that you have the financial stability to have spiritual savings account that you use for your spiritual life and its not going to break the bank to go on a retreat

and that you return to a stable life situation that you have the time for spiritual practice and the motivation spiritually to continue doing spiritual practice and living a stable, virtuous life. It's not for everybody, we are selective.

Rick: So what percentage of people do you accept out of all those who apply.

Joan: Well, there is synchronicity at play, and I believe the Divine helps people find us. We have been word of mouth, we are now word of Skype, but most of the people who have come to us have turned out to be qualified. If they are not, I simply ask them to wait, that they are not ready yet and there are clearly some things that most people can do to make their lives more stable and their prana systems more vital. And it requires some choice on their part. If people are living in a chaos that's not a setting for spiritual life. They have to tone down the chaos as best they can.

Rick: Great. Well, again three pages of questions here that I am not going to have time to ask. All kinds of stuff where there is so much we can talk about, your book is a gold mine of interesting information, but we will have to leave it at that for now, because we have been going on pretty long, but obviously as always I will be creating a page on batgap.com with little bit about you and with links to your website where they can get your book and stuff and if people are interested they can always find out more, contact you directly, and I will definitely be interested in doing a second interview with you at some point, maybe not right away, maybe a year from now or something when people have had a chance to digest all this...

Joan: And by then the second book will be out.

Rick: Great, yes, that might be a good time to do it. But I really enjoyed this as I knew I would...And you are a delight to speak with. And I respect your whole path, your whole life and what you have done with it and what you are doing with it. It's great.

Joan: Thank you.

Rick: Really valuable service for the world...

Joan: Thanks to the lineage of Kundalini Vidya and the blessings of Swamiji and that he taught me so carefully and diligently.

Rick: And even the fact that you have dealt with relatively small number of people I don't think is significant, because you have a function that serves people at a certain stage of their evolution and such people are not too common and so you are kind of like a finishing school or something...

Joan: That's a good way to put it. It's not a beginner's way.

Rick: Right. It's not for the masses or whatever...

Joan: Not for the masses...

Rick: But it's an essential tool I think in the spiritual market place that will be great for certain people.

Okay, so let me just make some general concluding remarks as you all know by this time who I have been speaking to and what I have been speaking about, but let me just speak about Buddha at the Gas Pump in general for a second.

If you are new to this show, it's an ongoing series once a week in general, go to batgap.com and explore the menus and you will see about all the past and future ones, apologies to those who wanted to tune in for live feed

today, it didn't work, we will get it fixed. Most of the interviews I do are livestream and it's nice to do that if you can, because you can send in questions as we go along. There is an e-mail sign up thing if you want to be notified by e-mail each time I post a new interview. There is a podcast which still works for some people and there is a problem that iTunes has that they are aware of their traffics and I eventually got the podcast totally fixed and there is a place to sign up for it on the site, there is a donation button which I mentioned in the beginning which enables us to do these whole thing those who support it. That's just about it. There are some other things. Explore the menus.

So thanks for listening or watching. Thank you again Joan. It has been great fun talking to you. Hope to meet you again in person one of these days.

Joan: Thank you Rick.

Rick: Thank you. Namaste.

Joan: Namaste...

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