

Atreya Thomas - BATGAP Interview #345

May 10, 2016

{BATGAP theme music plays}

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 awakening people. There have been over 340 of them now, and if this is new to you then got to www.BATGAP.com and you'll find all the previous ones organized under the 'Past Interviews' menu, in several different ways – alphabetical, chronological, topical and so on. You'll also see a 'Donate' button on the site, voluntary donations by those who appreciate the show are what make it possible for us to do it. So we really appreciate those who support it in any way, large or small.

My guest today is Atreya Thomas. There are some interview shows where it seems that the interviewer likes to try to interview as many famous people as possible because famous people have big followings, and if you interview famous people a lot, people search on their names and they get a lot of views. We interview some famous people but we also like to find people who aren't well-known at all, but who have had and are having a very genuine, spiritual awakening. Because I think it helps people - the listening audience - realize that this is something that doesn't just happen to famous people; it could happen to them. It's not just for the Deepak Chopras of this world.

I would say that Atreya is one such person. He and his wife have 3 adopted children. They live in California, he works as a preschool teacher. He and his wife are foster parents to drug-exposed infants who are hard to place. So I think that's pretty laudable, if one can be enjoying the awakened state while taking care of preschool kids and kids that have been influenced by drugs and so on, then one can do it anywhere, under any circumstances. Is that a fair enough introduction Atreya?

Atreya: Absolutely, thank you.

Rick: Are you still doing what I just described? It wasn't that long ago that you sent us that explanation.

Atreya: Yeah, actually, a child came to us yesterday.

Rick: Wow. How many such children are you taking care of at any given time?

Atreya: We have 3 adopted children and we normally have 2 foster children – usually newborns - anywhere between a day-old and a year-old.

Rick: Wow, and are some of them crack-babies or kids that are exposed to drugs in utero?

Atreya: Yeah, exactly – crack, meth, amphetamine, alcohol, PCP. These are all drugs that children have come to my home [already] exposed to.

Rick: Geez. I presume you take care of these kids for a period of time and then they get adopted by someone else or something, so you're like a transitional caretaker?

Atreya: Yeah, well we have 3 adopted children because no one could take care of them. They were our foster children originally, and so when they went up for adoption they were still under our care, so we just adopted them but normally somebody steps up in the family. And usually with drug addiction it's very, very difficult for the parent to get off the drug, so normally - so far in my experience, 100% of the time – the child has gone to a family member, like an aunt or a grandma or something like that.

Rick: Wow, it's a really wonderful thing that you're doing. Is there any kind of financial compensation? I mean, you get some support from the government ...

Atreya: Yeah, they provide for basic necessities like formula, all that stuff, and they also provide for the insurance for the child, because they often have a lot of medical needs. They're always born premature, every single time pretty much. And usually they have some physical problems that they have to deal with, especially for the first month, if they're withdrawing, they actually, their little bodies actually withdraw from the drug. So they're convulsing for that first month, just shaking – they just need to be held.

Rick: Wow. There's a verse in the Bhagavad Gita about the good fortune of being born in a family of yogis. And it's kind of interesting because here these kids have such a rough start, and then plop – they end up with *you* and your wife, who are yogis by anyone's definition, and what an interesting mix of karma.

Atreya: Yeah, it's a very unique situation. It's incredible to be able to experience the type of things that I do, because I do work with children and I do live a family-type life, and yet this intelligence works through that. And for me, it's pretty amazing to watch. Although it was very difficult in the beginning, for everybody, after I went through certain intense awakenings.

Rick: Well let's get right into that then. Let's backtrack. I recall from reading the bios in your book, which I might as well hold up at this point, *Revealing the Absolute* and *Revealing the Christ*. I read all of this one, which isn't a very thick book, and this one – *Revealing the Christ* – is like a commentary on the *Book of Matthew*, and I'm in the middle of reading it, very interesting.

As I recall reading the bios in the back, you were a pretty intense spiritual seeker throughout your 20s. And then you got kind of disillusioned or something, because nothing was happening, right? So take it from there.

Atreya: Yeah, through my 20s I had a lot of different spiritual experiences. Tons of different things that people would consider maybe even the *end* result. I am a very intense person so I've never felt

satisfied; everything was fleeting, all the experiences tended to be fleeting and I just always wanted something that was, you know, absolute!

Rick: Excuse me, were these experiences coming spontaneously or were you doing practices and this and that?

Atreya: No practices; I was always living outwardly a sort of a normal life, but inwardly, my primary experience was always very thinking, thinking, inquiring constantly, *while* I'm doing stuff.

Rick: While reading, dwelling on stuff?

Atreya: Dwelling, dwelling constantly.

Rick: And that evoked experiences.

Atreya: Exactly, that evoked experiences. I didn't really read that much because the one teacher I really got into was J. Krishnamurti, and I really felt the connection. And if you know his teaching, he doesn't allow you to think about anything, so anything that came you'd "throw it out," you'd "throw it out;" he basically has you just throw *everything* out.

And I kind of got to this place where I was just sitting in the void. I threw everything out and yet in retrospect, I look back and I realize that I thought at that point that was the highest state. But in retrospect, I look back and see that it was just spiritual ego sitting in void, you know? There was still a very strong sense of 'me.'

And so I didn't know where to go from there; I was just done. I threw out his books, I threw out every book that I owned and I just focused on just living a normal life. I was a teacher then too, I've been a preschool teacher for 13 years. A few years later I suddenly experienced this very, very intense awakening that just kind of hit me suddenly.

Rick: Just out of the blue?

Atreya: Just out of the blue, just very, very random.

Rick: Were you like eating breakfast?

Atreya: Right after dinner. If you guys check the webpage, there's a full explanation of the whole thing on the bio.

Rick: Oh, give it just in a nutshell though.

Atreya: Yeah, in a nutshell. There were 3 of them – 3 of them like that - and the first one I had just got home and was eating something. And I had just kind of finished eating and I felt something pulling away, like I felt like I was being separated from my reality. Everything just started to sort of pull back – it's kind of hard to explain - and I just couldn't function.

And at that time we already had a foster child who was 3 years old, and I think he had just come to us - who is my son now, whom we adopted. So my wife was very aware that something was going on with me and she was kind of stressing out, so I just left. And I was living in the middle of the city, of Philadelphia, so I just walked through the city for hours in this state.

Rick: You're talking about just that evening; you're not talking about days and days and days afterward?

Atreya: Well, it occurred for a couple of days - that evening and then into the morning. And then after a few days, the smoke sort of cleared and I felt this tremendous amount of peace, like I had never felt before. And it stayed with me for a couple of weeks, then it left, and now it's kind of back in the same boat.

But during those couple of weeks I had a lot of progress breaking down some conditionings that were coming up, some latent tendencies. And then it went away and I fell back in some old patterns, and then it didn't happen again - it didn't happen for another almost 2 years.

Rick: Old patterns of behavior or what?

Atreya: Yeah, some patterns of old behavior, things that I'd struggled with, things that had pushed me now back into seeking.

Rick: Because you didn't want to have that again.

Atreya: Exactly, I didn't want to have that again.

Rick: Did you feel like you were somewhat transformed, like there was some kind of remnant of it?

Atreya: There's definitely a remnant. The experience was there and the memory of it, and there were certain things that had broken down, certain conditionings, but I still ... well, it wasn't over, for sure. But I didn't really know what to make of it; I thought maybe it was a onetime thing and I started going back into focusing on outer things.

And then 2 years later it hit me again, even harder. And by this time we had moved across the country to California - from Philadelphia to California - this time it was *really* intense. I was sitting on the beach just hanging out, the kids were playing by the beach, I was feeling really good and relaxed and I started getting this pulsating feeling in my head and in the corner of my eyes. Again, things started pulling away. I tried to talk to my wife, I couldn't speak out. I would have a thought to speak and it would come out completely different. And the kids were laughing and my wife was laughing, but I felt like I was a million miles away. It was a *terrifying* experience!

Rick: After the first experience, did you explain to her what had happened to you so she kind of came to terms with it?

Atreya: Yeah, she definitely was asking, “You seem different, for those 2 weeks you seem really different?” And I didn’t really know too much about spiritual awakening, those types of terms and stuff, so I wasn’t really positive, I just knew that it was what I was looking for. When it hit me the second time, I didn’t even remember the first time. There was no comfort like, “Oh, I know what this is;” it was completely obliterating.

I really wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy, the experience itself. Not to say that everybody’s experience is that tense, but I think the intensity was due to the intensity of my seeking, of my devotion, and really, really, really wanting that, more than anything.

Rick: When you say that you were pulling away, can you explain that a little more clearly?

Atreya: Yeah, looking back and analyzing it, I suppose I can describe it as pulling away from the waking and the dream state. It felt like I was pulling away from my body and it also felt like I was pulling away from my mind, and that feeling stayed with me for 2 or 3 months, then it went away again. But during those 2 or 3 months I made a lot of headway, as far as breaking down all kinds of things.

When you have a family and you tend to live a normal life, you tend to confront so many things in yourself, and that’s sort of the double-edged sword. The beauty of it is you can learn everything about yourself in relationship to children – for sure – a wife, etcetera. So after 3 months of having that, again it went away.

Rick: I suspect that it didn’t go away abruptly; it just sort of tapered off, or what?

Atreya: It tapered off, exactly. I felt like I really wanted to hold on to it, but I could feel myself being pulled back into identification with the body. [For example], my wife had found a lump in her breast and there were all kinds of things that just *activated* the mind. And my children, they have some attachment disorder. My son, he came to us when he was 4 and he was abused, so he tends to be really challenging, really aggressive and he challenges everything. He’s not like, “I’m going to follow you;” he’s like, “I’m going to lead *everything*,” because he has that trauma.

Yeah, so I got pulled back into that and it wasn’t until 2 years later that it hit again. This time I was in the middle of actually working, I was actually teaching in the middle of a class. And this time it was even more powerful than the first 2 times. Everything sort of became really bright and this hum - there was like this hum or vibration that overtook my body and my mind, like I could hear it internally. That was the last one, and I knew that was the last, the last experience after it happened.

And then after that I came home and I just looked at my wife and she looked at me. And I took the ottoman from the living room and I put it in the backyard, and I just sat in I guess what you would call meditation. And I sat there, just sat. And I continued my life but I didn’t speak for almost 12 months.

Rick: At all?

Atreya: At all.

Rick: Well you must have had to quit your job?

Atreya: I didn't have to actually because there are people that work for me - I'm the director of a company, of a preschool, so I could delegate.

Rick: How could you delegate if you couldn't speak?

Atreya: Well I had this little pad, it was like an electric pad that you write on, and you hit a button and it erases. So I used that with my family and I had a dry erase board I would use.

Rick: Like Maher Baba, he used to write everything on a little chalkboard.

Atreya: Did he?

Rick: Yeah, dictated whole books that way and everything.

Atreya: Yeah, and it had a tremendous effect on everyone – my family, my immediate family and also my parents and all that.

Rick: Well they must have thought there was something seriously wrong with you.

Atreya: Yeah, they did. I mean, my wife didn't because she was able to see me. During the week when I wasn't working, I would probably be sitting outside 4 hours a day and on the weekends I'd be out there for 8 hours a day, just sitting. Not really intent on anything; just sort of absorbed in this sound – there was this vibration.

There was nowhere I wanted to be. I did what I did, what I had to do, but there was no more intention besides doing what I needed to do. And then that book that you read, *Revealing the Absolute*, during that 12 months of sitting, these insights would come to me and I would just write them down. There was never an intention to write a book, and then the book came about through that. From the beginning when I sat down, the book is in order from the insights that came to me, and I basically just framed a question around each insight. So the answers were already there, and I just created a sort of a fictitious student and framed questions around each one.

Rick: That's amazing.

Atreya: Interesting way to write a book.

Rick: Did you ever have any doubts during this period? Did you think, "Maybe I had an aneurism or something?" or did you feel like, "I know what this is?"

Atreya: If you read the bio on the webpage, it goes in detail, there's a lot of detail. Because I always [got] this question for the past couple of years, "What happened to you? What happened to you?" So I wrote it out about 4 months ago and it's on the website.

I thought I was having a stroke. I called a friend who is a doctor and I was like, "I can't speak," and I was able to actually speak that to him. And he was like, "You're probably having a stroke. What's your pulse?" So I took my pulse and it was normal, so he was like, "No, you're definitely not having a stroke. Drink a beer and ..."

I never went to the doctor, I never went to get checked out or anything like that. I just knew that it was what I was looking for, you know? But it wasn't what I expected, because you actually come in contact with death, you actually have to actually come in contact with it. After about 10 months or a year of sitting, quietly, I had another sort of awakening, but I wouldn't really call it an awakening; it was more like a choice.

I was sitting out there and I was contemplating. I remember what I was thinking, I was thinking, "If the Source of creation is truly present in all things, then it should be here, right now, and it must be right here under my nose!" So I just sat and I looked and I was like, "I should be able to see it," you know? And I don't know how long I intended that for, it could have been a pretty long time.

And then something happened to me and my heart rate went up, probably like a million miles, and I had a strong urge that I could either get up and panic ... and I remember looking to the kitchen door, like my mind just wanted to go inside. And I felt this choice, like I could either get up or I could find out truly what happens. And so I came to this threshold where I really felt like I have to die for this. And I actually made the choice, I thought I was going to die - "I'm going to die!" And so I decided, "I want this more than anything," and so I kind of passed through this threshold.

And my heartrate, I don't know if it stopped or if it slowed down, but it just kind of like went into the ground. And that's why the whole teaching really is a 'prayer for death' - that's how I describe this teaching. Because you really have to come in contact with that in order to truly die into the ground of the body, the mind, the deep sleep state - all that, all those 3 states that we exist in, in order to touch the final cause of that. You have to actually, *truly* actually come in contact with it.

Rick: Let's explore a few of these things that you've just said. Firstly about not being able to speak, was it that there was no impulse to speak, or did you actually *want* to speak but find yourself incapable of it?

Atreya: You mean for the 12 months?

Rick: Yeah, during the 12 months.

Atreya: No, I could definitely have spoken. It was sort of a choice. At first it wasn't, but as time went on, a couple of months had passed, it was creating such an extraordinary healing around my family - because all my kids had some trauma, my wife has certain issues, and it just seemed to be the cure, even for all my relationships. The silence, it brought all the kids sort of underneath my

orbit, and also my wife had to start dealing with all her stuff, like there was no longer a wall for her to blame or anything like that. And so I was doing it intentionally, after a few months, because it was working! It was working in every aspect of my life.

So some things crumbled away in my life, certain relationships, while others really were healed.

Rick: It's a tribute to your wife, in a way, because it seems like most wives would get pretty fed up with you not saying a word after a while, and they're trying to have a conversation with you and they want you to do this and that, and you're like Harpo Marx.

Atreya: Right, right, she struggled for the first couple of months. But at some point she would come out and I would be sitting, and she would just cry out with tears and say, "Just looking at you ... just tears of love. I love to just see you sitting there in meditation." She felt it, and it healed every aspect of our relationship.

Rick: Yeah, that's amazing!

Atreya: And some other aspects of my relationships, like with my parents and stuff like that, it kind of, unfortunately broke things down because they just couldn't accept what was going on.

Rick: Well they weren't with you day and night [like your wife].

Atreya: Exactly; they were 3,000 miles away, they assumed this or that. So it was difficult for some people.

Rick: Now that you are speaking again, have some of those relationships come around again?

Atreya: Not so much. Unfortunately they tend to be very *anti*-spiritual, ironically. Some are even self-proclaimed atheists, so sometimes the ideas the ideas of any of this stuff, it actually really provokes something in them, where they feel almost angry. There's something about it, just the whole idea makes them angry. They sort of subconsciously feel that that is a potential threat to their whole structure.

Rick: Yeah, I was going to say, it kind of challenges their worldview, their paradigm.

Atreya: Yeah, it does, it does strongly. And you see that with all kinds of different people. And I interact with so many different people - I see almost 400 kids a week, and teachers and everything, and for the most part I don't really engage in these types of conversations with people. But every once in a while something happens spontaneously, where someone is sort of 'there,' or just for some reason it has its own intelligence sometimes.

Rick: So you had this - I guess I forget what you called it - but the final kind of breakthrough, where you're sitting there and you had this wanting to know the Source of creation, and you kind of confronted death, as it were. Let's elaborate [on that] a little bit, because I think most people listening to this will understand what you mean by that - not that you were literally, physically going to die, but that there's sort of a death of the ego or something, that was taking place,

right? Let's just flesh that out a little bit so people have a better understanding of what you're talking about.

Atreya: Sure, if you read the book, *Revealing the Absolute*, you could see my journey -it's really my journey as I sat for the 12 months. I obviously had become the witness and at the beginning of the book it was like ego, ego, ego; I'm analyzing the ego. And then by the second chapter, it starts to get *completely* away from ego and it starts talking more philosophical, gets much deeper. And by the end of the book, it sort of absorbs, you could see the absorption. What was your question?

Rick: Just about death, for instance. Because I don't think you mean a literal, physical death, but more of a spiritual death; a death of the ego, death of the small, constricted boundaries that you had been grown up in.

Atreya: Right, but to the ego it felt that way.

Rick: Was there a fear associated with it? There must have been some fear.

Atreya: Yeah, absolutely, even after all that - 12 months of silence and going through all that stuff - I had come to another threshold where now it was time to let go of these last shreds. But what was interesting was that it was a *choice*, where the other 3 times it just hit me suddenly and it wasn't a choice. But this was like I had to *make* the choice; I felt like I could have gotten up and sort of shook it off.

Rick: Gotten yourself busy with something.

Atreya: Yeah, got myself busy, exactly ... do something, you know, but it was a choice.

Rick: To confront it.

Atreya: To confront it and go through that threshold.

Rick: I sometimes think of this transition as something like breaking the sound barrier, when Chuck Yeager first broke the sound barrier back in the 50s, I guess it was. They didn't know what was going to happen when the plane broke the sound barrier, and as he was getting to point of breaking it there was all this turbulence and shaking, and he could barely hold on to the stick. Then he broke through and it was ... *whew!* Kind of like this smooth[ness] once he had broken through. This is a good metaphor, in a way, for this transition that people go through.

Atreya: Yeah, it's the reconciliation of the known and the unknown, so I was right on that threshold of stepping into the unknown - that you just have to do it, going to do it. And I think it was my *years* of devotion and just being so intensely devoted, that when I got to that point, I was willing to do it. That's why I say devotion is kind of the prerequisite to go all the way, as far as you can possibly go, because you've got to have that perseverance.

Rick: So people listening to this might think, “Hey, I like the sound of that. How do I become more devoted? Should I read more books or go to more teachers or be more diligent about spiritual practices? How do I ramp up the intensity in my life so as to have something like he had?”

Atreya: Right, so that’s a good question. The truth is, everyone is devoted to something, so it is really important to know what it is that you truly want. You know, you don’t have to tell anyone or share it, but sit down and write on a piece of paper, what do you really want? And you could discover where your devotion *already* lies in life.

Rick: By how you spend your time.

Atreya: How you spend your time? What you think about? Who do you associate with? You know, the best basketball player, when he was young he constantly *watched* the best, was looking towards the best, because he wanted to be the best. And it’s extremely rare for someone to truly, *exclusively* want to find out what death really is, and what God is, it’s very rare.

Most people want some sort of ‘one foot in one, one foot in the other,’ which is fine, but it’s really important to just *know*, for *sure*, what is your energy going into. It’s like having a million dollars but you invest a dollar in all these different things and then you’re like, “I’m poor.” Well pull all your energy in, pull it all in, and like a laser go after it. That’s why the greedy business man is successful, because he actually knows what he wants. If it’s spiritual awakening or something like that that you *truly* want, then you’ll get it, but I don’t think people *really*, truly want it – to that intensity, to that exclusiveness. They kind of want a mixture.

Rick: Reminds me of a great story, I think it’s from the Upanishads. There’s this young boy named Natchiketa and he asked his father some kind of question, and his father got mad at him and said, “I send you to death.” And so he went to death’s door, which is the abode of Yama, and Yama wasn’t there at the time. So he sat there for 3 days, and when Yama came home he said, “Oh, I’m sorry” – you know, because there’s this whole thing in Indian tradition about being the host and treating guests like God and so on – so he said, “How can I make it up to you? I’ll grant you anything you want.”

And Natchiketa basically said, “I want the truth, I want the ultimate understanding of reality.” And Yama said, “Anything else - I’ll make you a king, I’ll give you give you great riches,” and all this stuff, “but please don’t ask me this.” He said, “No, that’s what I want,” and he just kind of stuck to his guns until he got what he wanted!

Atreya: Right, right, and if that story probably still exists today, 4,000 years later, it’s because it’s so *rare* to have that type of devotion; it’s so laser-like. Like I said, we all have devotion but if you ask somebody, “What do you truly want?” you would be surprised that people don’t really know; they’re kind of a mixed bag of things. They’re like, “Oh, well I kind of want this and this and that,” or “I want this and that,” but to truly touch the ground of existence, you have to want that exclusively. And that doesn’t mean not living your life, it doesn’t mean going into a cave

and pushing everything away; it means that that's what you think about *all* the time, you know what I'm saying?

Rick: I do, it's kind of what I think about all the time. But it's interesting because from the outside one would say, "Well Jesus didn't look like he was wanting that exclusively, and he's tending to crack babies and running a childcare place, and he's got a busy, worldly life. It doesn't look like from the outside a heck of a lot different than other people doing other things." But it's great what you're saying because a person might think, "Yeah, well fine for him to say but I couldn't possibly do this because I have a job and I have these responsibilities," but what you're evidencing by your own example is that regardless of the outer circumstances of one's life, one *can* have that laser-like dedication to this.

Atreya: Exactly, and I think that it is absolutely imperative that we say that because it reconciles all of that, all that diversity. Because our primary experience is the waking state and what we want in this body and our desires, but if that becomes secondary, that still goes on but then your primary experience is this internal devotion – "Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord," you know?

And that's why there has to be some sort of concrete aspect of 'the Lord' that you pour yourself into, completely. It doesn't mean something out of the system, it doesn't mean a Christian or a Buddhist or anything; it just means that whatever that is to you, that you know you're not and that you're trying to pour yourself completely into. Which I describe in the book as 'the final cause, because for me, those are the words that came to me because it's the singular cause, like the ground from which all things spring out of and die back into. So it's the *cause*, and I want to know that! I don't want to just think about it but I'm willing to think about it for a million years if I have to, until I pull that down.

Rick: "Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door shall be opened." I'm reminded of Mother Teresa, who in serving the poor of Calcutta would see them as Jesus, basically. And so she was washing Jesus's wounds and washing Jesus's feet as she was tending to these people, and seeing them as the expressions of God and she is serving God through her service to them.

And you said there has to be an object of devotion to which you pour yourself, apply yourself fully. Were you kind of doing that with the children you take care of? Were these children like God in children-form, and you were serving God and focusing on God by tending to these children?

Atreya: I'm going to say I never had that thought because the primary work really is done by my wife, like that type of newborn nurturing, holding these newborns. And of course I hold the babies and stuff, but it's really *her* ministry, that's where she really pours herself into. She doesn't think about spiritual things, she probably won't even watch this, but that is her devotion.

If you were to be able to hear her thoughts, everything is about babies, it's just filled with babies and how to optimize their health, and how to make sure that they start off and feel secure and attached and loved – that's everything [to her]. Every time she's on the computer that's what's

on the screen – baby stuff, so that’s really her thing. Although I do tons ... I cook all the meals - I cook dinner every night, I make the lunches for the kids for school, I make breakfast - I do all this mechanical stuff, but for me that is sort of my secondary experience.

Just like when you drive a car. You could drive home from work and be thinking about something *completely* different, yet you made your left, you stepped on the brake, you beeped your horn – you did all these actions but you were devoted *internally* to something else.

Rick: And did you feel that that primary internal devotion was in anyway diminishing your effectiveness in activity, as if you were distracted from the task at hand, or did it actually enhance it, or neither?

Atreya: I think at different stages of development I could say yes and no to different parts of that. Because there were certain parts where - especially with Krishnamurti, that whole Krishnamurti phase that I went through for like 2 years – it was like “Deny everything,” so I was really pushing away. And you have to watch that type of thing because it could turn you into an ego hater, so you’ve got to be really careful.

There was a phase where I was just really pushing everything away. There was no integration, it was just ‘throw everything out,’ you know, throw the baby out with the bathwater, throw it all out!

Rick: Hopefully not literally.

Atreya: Right, exactly. Krishnamurti really helped prepare the ground for these awakenings, because if you read his stuff, he doesn’t really *teach* you anything. He asks a million questions but he never gives an answer! So I always say, if you’re going to read Krishnamurti, when he asks a question in his book or something, close the book, write the question down and then try to answer that question for yourself. Because he’s never going to give it to you; he kind of empties you out and prepares that.

So there were phases I went through of pushing away. And when I met my wife, I was actually thinking about Buddhism a lot and writing out – I don’t remember too much of the teachings – but I was writing down some of their stuff, like ‘right thinking, right livelihood,’ and all that stuff, and I was trying to remember all that stuff.

Her name is Mahara, so when my wife came into my life I was into Buddhism and here comes Mara! Which is like, you know ...

Rick: The distractor.

Atreya: The distractor, right! So I really pushed her away and she kept showing up, showing up, showing up. So I never had that, “Oh, this is the person I’m going to fall in love with;” she just came into my life and wouldn’t leave! And so it was interesting and I never really integrated her into my life until 10 years later, after I had those awakenings.

I was always internally devoted, I was always deeply in love with trying to find that Source. I could infer that Source existed, so I had a deep longing and love for it, like I just want to be reunited with It, and it overpowered any type of love for anything, or anybody else really.

And it wasn't until I fell into the ground of all those things that I realized that everyone is included, my wife is included in that too. And then I started to see her *as* that, as I was [also] seeing everything else *as* that. So it wasn't really till 10 years later that I realized that our relationship became holistic and complete once I had fallen into that ground.

Rick: That's nice and it's very interesting. I guess it was just last week or so that I came across something I had heard many years ago about Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, who were advocating a kind of self-remembrance in which you kind of divide your attention so that half of it is on remembering the self, and the other half is on engaging in activity. That can make one extremely ineffective in activity; there can be this halting lack of spontaneity, like a division of the mind kind of thing.

So several points: when you were describing the awakenings that you had, you used the word 'withdrawal,' like you were withdrawing. It's one thing to try to witness by dividing your attention, but it's another thing to actually fall into witness state where you are naturally detached from the relative world. I don't know, maybe you went through a little bit of both; sometimes you were actually trying to disassociate and other times it was actually your condition.

Atreya: For sure, exactly, yeah. And so after that third awakening that I was sitting, I remember that only a couple of months in, as I was writing those little things about the ego and everything, I still felt this duality, like there's still a duality between this ego ... and I remember having a thought like, "Will I have to wake up every morning *with* my ego, next to me?"

So the seeking ended because I discovered that I was that, but the seeking didn't actually end; what happens is seeking transforms into something else. So it's the same intensity, even maybe more, it kind of mutates into intense love and devotion towards that ground. I felt it and I just love that, I just want to be with that. And eventually that pulls down the grace to actually have you merge with it and meet it, like the story you were saying –just so devoted like, "I'm just going to sit here until you show up and I'm willing to die for it." And that's why I often say things like, "You've got to be willing to die for it," and that turns a lot of people off actually, because it's like, "No, don't say that."

Rick: You just have to make sure that people don't take you too literally, you know, you don't want to inspire suicides or something. Because there are some kind of heavy stories in Zen and other things like, "I'm going to sit here in the snow until you accept me as your disciple," "I'm going to cut my arm off," you know, that kind of stuff and these radical dudes.

Atreya: Right, right. It's not really a death of the body; it's a death of everything that you know conceptually to be who you *think* you are, and that whole conglomeration that makes up the

'me' or the ego, and allowing those exclusive qualities about yourself to die back into their cause, their Source.

I remember asking myself this one question: "Can I die without harming the body?" I used to ask myself stuff like that. "How do I die without harming the body?"

Rick: And even here, were you actually thinking about the body dying, or were you thinking about the ego dying without harming the body?

Atreya: Right, so how can 'I'...

Rick: The 'I' sense.

Atreya: The 'I' sense, exactly, this sense of this pendulum swinging constantly between pain and pleasure. The 'I' that's worried today but happy tomorrow, and this sort of thing.

Rick: What made you think it would harm the body if the 'I' were to die? That you would become neglectful of the body or something, and not take care of it?

Atreya: Well I wanted to stay in the body and at the same time be free – be in it but not of it.

Rick: I see, be liberated.

Atreya: Be liberated; how can I stay *here* but at the same time die to all that?

Rick: I mean look what the Buddha went through, he went through this fasting and practically killed himself and that kind of thing, as others have done. So you were looking for liberation without damaging the body.

Atreya: Right, because what's the point of being liberated if you're just going to 'poof,' go somewhere else? It would make much more sense to be able to do that within a family, where kids have issues and this and that. You want to bring that ...

Rick: To be a living reality.

Atreya: To be a living reality and see what that looks like, actually, how that functions

Rick: I found it very interesting what you said about the witnessing phase, well firstly about the seeking phase giving rise to another phase, which had to do with intense devotion. You and I were talking before we started recording about teachers teaching to the level of the student, to a level that's appropriate to their audience, and how some people will have some realization, and for them the seeking energy will drop off and they'll tell everybody to stop seeking. Well I have more parts to this question but go ahead and comment on that one first.

Atreya: I think a lot of times they're just so relieved from the problems that they had before, from being identified with the waking and the dream state, being identified with the body and the mind, that when they actually discover themselves as a witness, they're *good*, you know? They tell

themselves, “I don’t have to be a Jesus or a Mohamad or a Maharishi, I don’t need to be a Buddha! I can really manage my life now. Look, my life is much better now from this vantage point.”

Rick: So everybody should do this.

Atreya: Right, so it’s an incredible feat to get to that stage. That alone is an extraordinary place to be and makes the world a better place, because you’re not now going to always give in to the impulse of that self-centered desire that’s going to wreak havoc in relationships - that is obvious, no one can deny that. From that witness stage you can live a very good life.

Rick: But can you just advise others to pop into that stage by something you might say, or might there be more involved? Can Stephen Curry stand way back outside the 3-point line and just swish these baskets and then say to others, “You do it too. All you have to do is stand back here and do that”?

Atreya: I think it’s important not to minimize the witness stage. I think that it takes extraordinary amount of *work* to get there. It’s not something that’s like, “Oh, this is an easy place to go but the next awakening is difficult.” To get to the witness stage you have to actually experience a certain death as well, there has to be a falling away of that conglomeration that goes by your first name; there has to be this breaking down. And the pace is determined by the level of intensity; how much are you putting all your chips on it? How much are you really putting all in it?

Rick: Yeah, it actually says that in the Yoga Sutras, it says that the pace of your realization will be determined by the degree of intensity. And it kind of categorizes spiritual aspirants in terms of mild, medium, and intense.

Atreya: Yeah, see that’s true, and all someone has to do is validate that in themselves and look at people who are successful at doing *anything*; awakening is the same thing. But no one, and I shouldn’t say no one, but it’s rare for someone to really just want that *exclusively* because it’s to the exclusion of everything else! It’s to the exclusion of all your desires, so you have to turn away from all your desires and all that stuff, so that you can exclusively focus on attaining that.

Rick: Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book called *Outliers*, in which he talked about people like Bill Gates or The Beatles, and some others who became really, really successful. And he said they put in at least 10,000 hours of practice in order to get where they got to. And I’m not saying somebody should put in 10,000 hours of meditation or anything; there could be all sorts of ways this could be interpreted, but it sort of illustrates your point of really serious intention of one’s application.

Atreya: That’s right, intention, intention, and we all have that. That’s why I said before, we all have devotion; it’s not like you have to pull devotion in from somewhere else. What is important is to see where your devotion really is.

So that's what I always suggest to people asking, "Where should I start?" I simply say, "Well find out what are you already doing?" All you have to do is look at your daily life; you don't have to aspire to the future or look to the past, just look up today and watch yourself. Observe what is it that you are really devoted to, you know?

That's a good place to start, is to just find out what you're already invested in and ask yourself - look at that list of things. If there are 10 things on it, ask yourself, "Is there one thing on this list that I'm willing to give everything up for - on this list - to just do this one thing?" And I think most people will find out what they truly want. And if it's awakening that you truly want then you'll get it, but you might realize that, "Hey, that's not really what I want," or "I kind of want that but I'm not really willing to give up these other things."

Rick: And that's okay if that's what you want.

Atreya: And that's okay, yeah, but just clarify that's all. Just make sure that you're extremely honest with yourself and clear about what you're actually investing your intention in.

Rick: Yeah, and I think it bears repeating that if you establish your priorities like that, it doesn't necessarily mean you're going to leave your family or relinquish your responsibilities; it's not on that level, and you're a good example of that.

Atreya: Yeah, having the family and children and stuff like that in my life, it always *pushed* me actually, to say, "Can I sit in this preschool class with all these children but still remain, you know?" -it was always a push. And, "Can I have a wife and have these types of relationship dynamics yet still ...?" If it's real, then it must be applicable to *any* situation.

It's the best thing because it just pushes you, it speeds up the process, if you truly want that. Because like I said, relationships will show you everything about where your intention is, so it gives you an opportunity to pull all those investments back in - not physically; mentally.

Rick: Ram Dass said, "If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your parents."

Atreya: Right, exactly, it will show you everything, everything.

Rick: I'm interested in something you said a little while ago about how the seeking dropped off and you were kind of in this witnessing stage, and then that somehow morphed into devotion - this really intense devotion. Would this make sense to you, that once the witnessing stage had dawned, then there was a sense of 'you knew who you were,' and that became the foundation for the heart really beginning to grow and for being able to really appreciate what all this is, or want to appreciate it, whereas previously, before you even had a sense of who and what you were, there was no foundation for that sort of appreciation?

Atreya: I think that's pretty accurate because before the witness stage, there's sort of this desperate feeling to find it. And you're not even sure what it looks like, you're just digging and you're hoping to find something shiny, you know? Some people say this, some people say that, but

again, Krishnamurti for me was saying, “Don’t listen to what *anybody* says, don’t look at any book; just go, just big.” Once you discover that, then that sets the foundation.

I remember one of the first thoughts I had was, “The seeking is over. I am what I was looking for. I actually *am* what I’m looking for, and now I’m just sort of going to sit there in it.” At first it wasn’t a choice but then gradually it started to apply itself; that intelligence started to apply itself because I’m still living in the world, I’m still going out.

I think that is sort of the science of spirituality: the application of stillness into form, the abstract intelligence applying itself to this diversity, although they are at one, [but] for description purposes ... that’s the harmony, that’s the relationship, the Divine couple.

Rick: That’s great. This is a bit of a diversion but I like to ask people’s questions when they send them in. I was asking you this before we started the interview and someone named “K.” from St. Paul, Minnesota says, “Can you comment on the choice of your first name? It is the name of an ancient Indian Rishi and I am curious about your reasons for picking it.”

Atreya: Sure, sure. So after 12 months of silence I was standing in the grocery store, and there was a man in front of me. He had a picture of a saint on his shirt, but it was one of those pictures that you see on a gaudy candle in the dollar store – like the color is parched. The first thing I said after 12 months was to this man who was standing next to me!

And I said, “The Lord becomes you in the absence of the me.” He kind of just stared at me and we had this really strong connection. And then he started talking to me and he said, “You know, why don’t we speak a little bit? That’s very powerful. Why don’t you come see me at my office?” And I did. And he was a psychologist.

So I actually winded up meeting with him for a few months! He said that my insurance covered all of it, like five dollars or something, and I don’t know if that’s true but he wanted me to be there. And he’d listen the whole time. And it was kind of a time for me to really recalibrate what I was feeling and coming back to the speaking.

I met with him once a week, we would have these conversations, I would really talk and he would listen. And he gave me a couple of books. He gave me a book by Dattatreya, which is a Hindu god I guess. There are some blurry lines with that; they don’t know if he was an actual living person or if he was a god or something, but when I read that book I just cried. I said, “I know this is it,” there was something about this book that ... this is who I am, this is how I *feel*. And so every time I read a little bit, I would just shut it and be like, “This is just saying exactly how I feel!”

So when I started the webpage – my wife built a webpage and she made a little Twitter account for everything, after I had published a book – she simply took that book and took half the name off, because she knew I was always looking at it. And so it was ‘Atreya’ instead of Dattatreya, so

it was kind of like a homage. If I was ever to say I had a guru, I would say that Dattatreya would be it. But he wasn't there before any of this; he was there to validate it.

Rick: He was like the confirmation.

Atreya: Right. I was given the Bhagavad Gita and when I read that, and I'm not even sure that I got through the whole book, because every time I'd read a line, I would just feel welled up with so much love! Almost like that devotion, I would feel such a strong love all the time inside, and when I read that it was like, "That's that! That's who I love." Not necessarily Krishna but whoever is speaking this book, that's my Beloved. Atreya was used to answer the question to honor that.

Rick: That's nice. You've alluded to devotion and love and I like that, because not all spiritual teachers do that; a lot of them stay in sort of an abstract, absolute, a little bit non-feeling kind of presentation. I think that's legitimate but I think that there's more, and that more very often has to do with the blossoming of the heart.

You're written a commentary on the Book of Matthew, so you seem to have an appreciation for Christianity and from what I've read of your commentary, it goes very deep. You often refer to 'God' or 'the Lord' and so on, in questions you answer. So let's talk about God a little bit, what do you feel like your relationship to God or what God is, how that relationship is perhaps blossoming, and continues to blossom for you.

Atreya: Sure. Ever since I was a kid I was kind of a solemn - if you looked at me when I was a kid you'd say, "Oh, that kid doesn't look very happy," I was always considered a very serious child. I remember from a very, very, very young age, even 2 years old, because I remember an event when I was 2, so I remember actually feeling that there's something *just* not right about everything that I'm experiencing. And that was also accompanied with a feeling of 'there must be something more,' and that sense of 'more' evolved into the idea of God - there must be something more, you know?

Although I didn't grow up in a religious home; I grew up in a single parent home and so there wasn't a lot of structure or anything like that, but definitely my idea of God has evolved constantly, from a very young age. You know, as you go through these different stages, I think sometimes definitions change. It's like when you hear a song when you were younger and you hear it again 5 years later, or you read a book or something, you extract different meaning out of it according to your level of understanding.

So I feel like I went through all different levels of that idea of 'God,' from being something 'out there' that you cry out to, something you pray to, to something that ultimately I merged into and I've had that experience. But now my view on God is that It's everything simultaneously, but nothing exclusively, so you can't really define it, because it's the sum. So the sum equals the one - I say that a lot. The sum equals God, so as soon as you say, "God is this," then it is to the exclusion of other things and it can't really be God. So you can only experience It *as* the sum.

Rick: Like totality.

Atreya: The totality, and it can only be *experienced*, like you actually have to say, "I want to experience that, I want to actually know, I actually want that." Again, we're going back to intention, the intention has to be lasting and abiding, it has to really be *abiding*. And you have to be able to persevere through all these different conditionings that come up to try and pull [you] back into a sense of exclusiveness. And that is the ego – the ego says, "Like this, don't like that." Not that we can't have preferences, but if you could just for 30 seconds, just let it all go, that's all it takes because it's timeless.

The actual experience isn't like this lengthy experience; it happens simultaneously and you experience everything. My experience was experiencing everything simultaneously - actually experiencing myself in all things, times and places, like that was my actual experience.

Rick: So that was just a flash for a bit, or is that something that's kind of abiding now?

Atreya: Well it's abiding now, but the actual meeting of that, the actual threshold pushing through that, was complete, but you can't really stay in that state *completely*. You can, but I don't know what would happen.

Rick: Do you think you might not be able to function if you did?

Atreya: Honestly, I don't know.

Rick: I mean because we kind of get used to functioning in states which initially might be so radical that we wouldn't function, but eventually we acclimate and we can function.

Atreya: Yeah, well the best way I can describe it is, when you fall into the ground or the final cause of everything, you lose your character, you lose your personality. But your former personality is still within that ground, you gain it back but now it's under the dictatorship of that Intelligence. It's no longer working on an exclusive line, but now since you are remaining as all things simultaneously, that *includes* your former character so it still gets used, you know what I'm saying?

It doesn't negate the ego; it integrates it and makes it nonexclusive. And so that Intelligence uses it as a tool when it needs to. And if you are still living in a family and stuff like that, then that Intelligence is going to *use* that whenever it needs to, because it's congruent with homeostasis.

Rick: You sent me a thing that I'll read to here, because I guess you've heard me talk about this on other interviews, but you said, "If there is no exclusive me after awakening, then who is it that feels pain? There is obviously a localized entity experiencing a jab in the ribs, no?" And so it kind of sounded just now like you said that there's still going to be some sort of personality that you've had all your life, but you are not exclusively that anymore; that is like a costume that the

Intelligence wears in order to function in the world. But don't let me put words in your mouth, how would you comment on the question I just read and what I just said?

Atreya: Well we're born onto this planet, we're born into a body, and we can call that the 'waking state,' just for description, and our waking state is dependent on our senses. And then gradually within ... not even very long, the mind is already there so the mind starts to create a language and that's the dream state that you can dream in. And these two states sort of come together and the ego is created according to memory, experiences, and all that stuff, so you have a sense that "I am the body, I am the mind, and I'm going to go after what I want, in this body. And I'm going to make it something for myself, I'm going to live, I'm going to experience."

You know babies, they put everything in their mouth – keys, pencils, everything goes straight to the mouth! They're like, "I'm going to taste this, I'm going to touch this," and at about 6 months or even earlier, babies start grabbing everything, so now, "I'm going to grab, I'm going to touch this, I'm going to taste this, I'm going to look at everything." That's natural and organic to identify with the body, at first.

Sometimes we come to a point that we ask ourselves, "Is there anything besides this, because it's pleasurable, it's painful?" Sometimes a person asks, "Is there something besides this pendulum swing, of managing this body and sort of pushing away this, but trying to hold on to that?" Once that happens, that sets up the spiritual seeker to look for a different state.

Through their perseverance and their intention they find the witness, which may be the deep sleep state. That's why people who are the witness, they're kind of like asleep; everything is a dream, there's no ego, they're sort of sleeping, like, "Oh, that's not real." But if you go further beyond that and you're not satisfied with the witness state, then you find there's a fourth state - and I'm not sure it's a state but there's a cause for all 3 states – and then that becomes your primary experience, rather than the waking state.

The jab in the ribs, you know, there's still pain, it's happening in the waking state, you're not denying that, but it's not the *only* thing you're experiencing; you're also experiencing the other 3 states simultaneously and you also have a sense that that you are the cause for all 3 states. It doesn't go away, I know that sounds a little complicated, but eventually you don't deny *any* of the states, but your primary experience is all 3 simultaneously.

Rather than experiencing the jabs in the rib *exclusively* in the waking state and then you're all activated and everything else, you're going to feel that but you're also sensing the other states as well, simultaneously.

Rick: Let me juxtapose my understanding of that with yours and see if we agree, and I'm willing to revise my understanding; it's just the way I see it and it doesn't perfectly fit, maybe it'll be some material for discussion.

You probably heard the word 'turiya,' which means fourth.

Atreya: I've never heard that word.

Rick: That's just a word that refers to the transcendent, it's the fourth state. And actually, they've done physiological research on people who sit and transcend in meditation, and they're without any sort of sensory activity because they've been totally absorbed into pure consciousness, and physiologically it is a fourth state! It's as different from waking, dreaming, and sleeping as they are from each other, as measured by all sort of things – blood chemistry and brain waves and all sorts of stuff.

So with that structure, we could define the four states of consciousness: that pure consciousness state, and then waking, dreaming, sleeping – the other 3 states. We call those states of consciousness because they're unique, one from the other, both subjectively and physiologically. Then over time, that fourth state gets stabilized and begins to be the ground of one's life, one's identity, one *is* that pure consciousness regardless of what other state one may be in.

One may be in a waking state doing things, or in a dreaming state, or in deep sleep state where there's no sensory activity and yet pure consciousness abides because it's beyond sensory activity. It's not experienced through the senses and therefor the senses don't need to be active in order for it to be alive, for it to be awake to itself. So how does what I just described juxtapose with what you just described?

Atreya: Yes, I think that's very good and accurate. It's sort of the thread that goes through all the states, and so when you abide *as* that, then you are in all 3 states simultaneously. So there's activity going on the waking state, there's activity going on in the dream state, the deep sleep state, and there's no conflict there.

Rick: That's where I differ slightly in my understanding, and again, I'm not arguing with you, I'm just trying to clarify. I'm not sure you are *in* all 3 states simultaneously, like you're awake you're dreaming and you're asleep all at the same time, but it's more like the fourth state - turiya, pure consciousness – can be there whether you're awake or asleep or dreaming. It's sort of like the substratum or the foundation of the ever-changing relative states, but I may be wrong. Do you really mean to say that you are simultaneously awake and asleep and dreaming, all at once, or do you mean something more along the lines of what I just said?

Atreya: To clarify, I think when you're residing in that, like you said that fourth state, or what I'm going to say is the ground from which the other 3 states are latent. Sort of like those things you know, where you push your hand up the needles and it makes a form?

Rick: Oh yeah, yeah, you can do a sculpture with them.

Atreya: Yeah, where you push your hand and it pushes up? So it's kind of like that. The 3 states are latent and they're there simultaneously, but it pushes up exclusively into the waking state when

it needs to, or the dream state, or the deep sleep state. So that Intelligence acts in those 3 states on its own will, when it needs to and when it is congruent.

Rick: Would you say that it's not that it just comes and goes as is needed, but that it's really there all the time and kind of nourishes or enlivens the other 3 states?

Atreya: Right, that cause is there all the time, but the 3 states are there, latent, but they're not activated all the time. So I think that that is sort of congruent with what you are saying as, they are there – all there simultaneously - but that Intelligence isn't pushing up all the time through all 3 states at the same time.

Rick: I see, maybe it does them alternately, sequentially.

Atreya: Right, whatever it needs to do, but it will always be right on time, it's always in harmony, it's always congruent, it's always perfect. So if it needs to do something in this state or that state, it *does*, spontaneously, whatever it wants to do.

Rick: Yeah, something related to this is that it is said that there is a gap between each of the 3 states, so as you transition from waking to sleeping, or from dreaming to deep sleep, there is a kind of gap. And that with time and with clarity, that gap widens, and that's one way of approaching the appreciation of the fourth state being the substratum of the other 3.

Atreya: Exactly, I think of it as [that] those states become translucent. So it's like they become that light of consciousness, that perfectness is able to shine through it perfectly. Although it's there, but it's very clear, you know, translucent rather than tarred over by these conditionings, which is the ego and the 'me.'

Rick: Yeah, that's really good. Everyone's heard the movie screen analogy where the movie plays on the screen and overshadows the screen, so we're talking about somehow the screen becoming so bright that you see the screen even though you're watching the movie.

Atreya: Exactly, so that the screen becomes your primary experience, although you're not denying the images on the screen, but it's not your primary experience because you don't have a vested interest anymore in preserving the 'me.' Because those images on there are your whole character, your whole story, and now that you see that you're not that exclusively, then you're not so obsessed with that anymore. You allow that to be the backdrop rather than the forefront.

Rick: That's very well put. I'm glad we got into that, I think it sort of clarifies things a little bit. And incidentally, those who are listening, if they have any questions just type them in on the 'Upcoming Interviews' page and we'll ask them.

So I won't read this whole thing that you wrote to me because it would take too long to read it, but would you say that - and again, I don't mean to put words in your mouth so disagree with this if you wish, but – would you say that just as we have a body and we have senses – sense of smell, sense of taste, etcetera, and we have an intellect and we have a mind – that there are

these different faculties, and that the sense of ego or self is a faculty which ordinarily kind of runs the show and one feels that 'that is me and I'm experiencing these things,' and after realization that you are something far beyond that - we've been talking about a fourth state - does that faculty of ego utterly disappear, or is it relegated to its proper place and serves in a functional role in order to make life livable?

Atreya: Yeah, exactly. Once it dies into the ground or the Source, then it becomes fully integrated into that, and if it needs to be used, then that Intelligence will use it accordingly. And obviously, if you look outwardly, the thinking mind, the creative mind, the mechanical mind does extraordinary things! It's a beautiful thing to have all this technology and all these wonderful things, and to be able to cook your food so perfectly and all that stuff, [so] that's obviously its natural function, is to help preserve the body.

But when the body is so well taken care of, it needs something to do, so now it creates a 'me' that it's going to preserve. It's really hard to have a 'me' if you're living a caveman 50,000 years ago and you're just trying to survive, you're not really worried about your opinions and stuff like this.

The whole ego is designed to preserve the body, mechanically. Now that we're at a place where a lot of people – obviously not the whole world, but a decent amount of people – they don't know what to do with the ego. So it sort of just creates this entity, [this] self-preservation entity that's going to now preserve its ideas, its opinions, its beliefs, its sense of 'me.'

Rick: Yeah, and that probably was there in a rudimentary form back in the Neanderthal days, you know, "My tribe good, that tribe bad, me kill them."

Atreya: It makes sense, right? Exactly. It obviously has a natural function, just [that] when it becomes exclusive, in the sense that it actually feels like there's nothing else *but* a personality, and that's where I derive my happiness from, and then that needs to be preserved.

And there are a million teachings out there that are all saying that - that that is helping the person get to that witness stage, because the witness stage is really seeing the ego and the body as something that is being witnessed. Breaking down ego and its attachment is obviously really important, but we don't want to get carried away with that too, because we could have a whole interview on that, but the spiritual ego, obviously, is easily born out of things like that.

Rick: Yeah, that's a whole issue in itself.

Atreya: Yeah, that's a whole issue in and of itself, and important for people to investigate on their own. Really look into that, be honest with yourself and see, again, coming back full circle, really know what is it that you're intending, what is it that you truly want, and what is it that you are also preserving, because a lot of our energy goes into preservation. So what is it that you are truly trying to preserve when so much of the awakening process is really falling away? It is sort of a surrender. So then that has to be looked into too.

Rick: Here's a question that just came in from Dan in London. He asks, "Hi Atreya, do you think it's possible that some people actually are born already in an awakened state, or naturally find themselves in that state as they grow up, without any struggle or seeking? Assuming this is possible, I think that the awakened state might be completely normal for that kind of person, to the extent that they don't even realize they are in it because they have never known anything else. Do you think this is a possibility?"

Atreya: Anything is a possibility, but there has to also be a refinement. To be born awakened without actually having the experience *in* the body, of touching the Ground and actually experiencing that Source *while* you're in a body, if you're already that coming into the body, then there's not going to be that reservoir of knowledge that you're going to tap into, because that is sort of knowledge comes when you die *into* the Ground because that's where it is all at. When you fall into the Ground, then you have access to that whole school of understanding and knowledge, simultaneously.

Rick: It depends on what you mean by awakened.

Atreya: Right, it depends, if you equate awakening to just knowing yourself in spite of mind and body, then that is the witness but that's not the final state; you have to also touch, actually come in contact with the Ground and the Source. So I'm not sure, I'm not sure if that can be done before birth, although you could say, "Well, I came from that Ground," but there has to be an experienter to actually experience that and then have that marriage between body, mind, and the final Source.

Rick: Some spiritual traditions would say that if you're really awakened then you're not going to be born, that the purpose of birth is to get enlightened or to become awakened.

Atreya: Some of the oldest traditions, they say that, that we're here because we didn't quite get it last time.

Rick: Right, we're in school here, we haven't graduated. But there are other people I speak with and have spoken with that say that they distinctly remember as a child, being in a unity state, and then beginning to lose it as they went into their teenage years, and then maybe rediscovering it when they got a little older, but always having that yearning to rediscover it.

And a lot of times people say, "Well babies, they're so pure and innocent. They must be enlightened and then they lose it because society corrupts them." But I would say that if we really want to define enlightenment, it's a fully integrated thing, I mean, you should be able to run a daycare center and deal with crack babies and what not, which obviously an infant can't do. There has to be this integration and maturation in order for it to be stable under all circumstances.

Atreya: Exactly, yep. You have to be able to look at your life and go, "There's something else, I'm still not quite ..." – you know, you have to be totally honest. And it doesn't mean that absence of

everything; it just means that you actually have experienced, actually have come in contact with something that transforms you. And it's kind of hard to explain what it is but you infer it, you intuit it that it's there by its effect.

Just like a scientist. A scientist will tell you, "Hey, you know, there's cause and effect, cause and effect." Well why isn't there a final cause then for everything? It makes sense and we can infer, if you look deeply, that there should as well then be a singular cause for everything. And if you really investigate that, you can validate that and then go after it and say, "You know what, I want that, I want to know that." And that's why it does take extraordinary perseverance.

Rick: They're persevering in London because here's another question from London, from Davie: "Could you please talk about the nature of extreme fear? I have experienced states of oneness and the absence of a separate self, which have then been followed by *very* intense fear which has remained for prolonged periods of time. You spoke of some of your experiences of fear on the 'Bio' page of your website."

Atreya: Yes, fear is obviously something we experience in the body and also those corresponding thoughts, so you couldn't say you were afraid unless you were able to identify certain qualities in your body and also certain thoughts in your mind. The body has conditioning just like the mind does. There is an awakening that also takes place in the body. You awaken to these 3 different states – the waking state, which is the body, and the dream state, which is the mind, the deep sleep state.

So the fact that you've already gone through certain awakenings and now the body is going to have to go through that too, sort of "catch up," and I experienced some of that as well. The ego dissolves but then it does take time for the body to catch up, and as this energy, or this grace surges through the body, it can cause all kinds of disruptions.

Rick: House cleaning.

Atreya: Yeah, exactly. They changed the water valve out by the street and our water pressure went up, maybe like 50 times in the house because they changed this mechanism outside. And it blew all kinds of [things], like the washer and it blew half the sink apart. So basically, when you add this pressure of grace and this surge of energy, the body has to take the brunt of that. And I think that is one of the benefits of spiritual practice, of meditation and stuff like that, because it really primes the body for this brunt of grace that's going to enter it.

I've made jokes before like sometimes, in my experience anyway, you have to sometimes be like an athlete; your body has to be almost athletic to take the brunt of that force. But I don't think everyone experiences it that intensely. I think for me it was that intense because of my past conditioning and my intensity and my body-type. But just hang in there and stay fixed in the witness like you're doing, and do things to help the body - take those quiet walks, try not to stimulate it too much, help it drop the shoulders and relax, and let this stuff flow through you. Because sometimes fear is merely that energy just blasting through you, that wants [you] to

allow it to run its course, unless you're afraid about something very specific, then you need to look into that and find out that conditioning and dig that up and surrender that.

Rick: Yeah, you talk about that quite a bit in various writings about the necessity of culturing the mind and body, or purifying it in order to bear the brunt of awakening. I think that's an important point, people may be underestimating the power of the energy that's going to be unleashed when awakening occurs. There really is a necessity to purify and prepare and so on, in preparation for that.

Atreya: Absolutely, yeah. And I think that looks different for everybody, I don't think everyone is going to have that much of an intense experience. Sometimes it will be gradual, sometimes it will be over decades - that energy kind of leaks in and transforms. For me personally, I was going after it very, very intensely. I didn't want to have my intention a little bit here, a little bit there, so it came to me in full force because I wanted it *now*, you know, I don't want to wait, and there was all this stuff in me that needed to be cleaned out.

Rick: One thing I wanted to ask you is that you are still a relatively a young guy – how old are you now?

Atreya: 36.

Rick: 36, you've covered a lot of ground so to speak, in the last 15 or so years, in terms of your experience. What sort of ground do you seem to be breaking these days? Are you just resting on your laurels or do you feel like, "Wow, stuff is still unfolding?"

Atreya: No, I tell you, I just keep going further into applying this stillness to different questions - I sent you a bunch of those questions.

Rick: Yeah, I read all those.

Atreya: Great. I still have this intensity to just fully be present and to empty to each situation so I can then see it in the light of that stillness. And when that takes place, there's a refinement and a learning, like a learning process that goes on with everything I do and everything I meet. It doesn't feel over to me, although it doesn't feel like seeking. It just feels like an intense exploring and a love to just seeing myself in all things.

Although I don't have any desire to *explore* things, but my life is set up the way that it is so I interact with a lot of different people and come across a lot of different things. So that's just my life, is to interact with people on a very day-to-day life type thing.

Rick: And so as you go on month-to-month, how is it that you ... you mentioned the word 'refinement – what is it in the nature of your experience is getting refined? I mean if you could snap back to where you were 6 months ago, what would you notice in terms of a contrast? And looking forward, if you were to snap where you might be 6 months from now, what element in your experience do you feel is refining or evolving, that you would notice a contrast?

Atreya: I sense myself as an unchanging awareness, but there's also this relative thing going on in a body, so that's being refined. I have children and I have a 10 year-old, and I'm always learning what that looks like to apply that stillness to all *kinds* of different situations that I think are always fresh - like my kids are always having problems, and stuff like this. And my son, he is interested spiritually but he doesn't know where to go with it, so interactions with him help me refine how does that apply to a 10 year-old who has ADHD and some trauma issues, and stuff like this?

So basically it is a refinement of the *human* condition becoming more translucent, so that light of consciousness can then shine through that. Maybe refine is not the right word, maybe it's more of a polishing of that human jewel so it does become translucent, so everything I do the light of consciousness shines through it.

Rick: That's a really good answer, I like that a lot. I think people listening will like that. Because obviously, like you say, the silence, stillness that you are, that doesn't change, it's very nature doesn't change, but it seems to me there's a world of possibility for the way that that's going to shine through and express itself, and the impact that that realization is going to have on your behavior, your perception, your emotions, everything.

Atreya: Right, right, so basically you watch that Intelligence operate on these very normal, typical situations, you know? Like I have a classroom of ten 3 year-olds, obviously they are all completely identified, but if I ask my group of 3 year-olds, "Do you have a body?" they all raise their hand. And I say, "Who has a body?" and they say, "I have a body." At 3 years old they are already aware that they have a body, so I'll create these little experiments for them that help them get in touch with that.

But then if you ask them, "Do you have thoughts?" they'll say, "Yeah, I have thoughts," and they can tell you what they're thinking. So they already have the sense that they're separate from this, but that's as far as they can go; if you say anything else, they don't get it. So I get to see how this operates, it's a daily thing, and it's very creative. There are all kinds of things that are born out of this creativity that help propel and also polish everybody I come in contact with, according to their level, from a 3 year-old to an 80 year-old.

Rick: That's really cool.

Atreya: It's extremely nimble. It's always spontaneous, it's extremely nimble. It's very unorthodox because it has to be prepared to meet whoever, whenever, at any level of understanding.

Rick: I'm reminded of the prayer of Saint Francis, you know, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." I see you an instrument of that peace, serving in really interesting ways that not too many people in your position, consciousness-wise, would be serving in.

Atreya: Yeah, exactly, and so it's pretty interesting to watch how that operates in a household of 5 people, 2 babies, often a stressed-out wife, how does that operate? It brings homeostasis. And I would say a lot of the part of that in my actual household is silence, you know, I don't talk a lot,

still. Although I do talk more than I did in those first 12 months, but that stillness always brings all the variables under my orbit without them really even knowing, you know? And it just helps keep things, [keep] the needle from going from *way* over here to *way* over here.

But that takes a lot of humility too. Humility is an important thing to have as a human being, when interacting in other human relationships. Allowing yourself – your human form - sometimes to be humiliated without any sense to preserve it, just so you can dissipate that energy. Your kid or your wife doesn't mean to be angry or this and that, so you just allow yourself to sort of take in that energy and then it gets processed and filtered through you, then you send it back as refined, pure energy.

Just as a light hits a prism, it blasts into a bunch of different colors, basically, they're giving you all these different colors but you're being able to process it, filter, and give it back to them as pure light. And that heals them.

My wife, when I was silent, and even when I'm silent now – sometimes I'll be silent for days or weeks – but she'll come up to me and just go, "Thank you, I love you so much." And I'm thinking to myself, "I didn't *do* anything besides be quiet!" So sometimes just being quiet – and that doesn't mean aloof; it means being actively present. That means touch, that means picking up your kids, it means being close to your wife.

Experiment with that. I would tell people to be actively involved in the relationships in your life, but in silence. It doesn't mean aloofness, it doesn't mean pushing them away; it means being *totally* present – eye-contact, writing stuff on a board if you want to communicate. Just experiment with it for a couple of days and you'll see that you can bring a balance to your home, for sure.

Rick: I liked what you said about humility, I think you addressed that in some of your writings too. I guess one way of putting it would be 'getting out of the way,' or that Saint Francis quote I just used, "Lord make me an instrument of thy peace." If you're trying to run the show, then how is the Lord going to do that?

Atreya: Right, so that the whole thing is wrapped in there: faith, surrender, humility - it's all wrapped in there, [in that] "Not me, You, Lord. Not me, You," it's having that sense of ...

Rick: "Thy will be done."

Atreya: "Thy will be done," and really developing a love relationship, and that's devotion. Developing that real intense love relationship for the Source, and then eventually that pulls down the grace where it reveals itself to you and you actually get to merge with it.

And once you have that experience, that's never going to leave you; you have that experience. It's just like someone who is a musician, if they don't pick up a guitar or the drums for another 20 years, they could always get behind the kit and play, you know? It might sound a little rusty,

but they are always going to have that baseline foundation of what they've acquired. Spirituality has to be approached the same way.

From my personal perspective, I do think that you can only go so far without devotion to 'something greater than myself,' because as long as you don't have that receptacle to pour yourself into, then you're always going to leave a shred of yourself to then possibly grow into spiritual ego.

So you have to create that receptacle that you're going to throw all your trash into, and then at the end you throw the receptacle out too; you throw the whole can out, with all the garbage.

Rick: That's nice. Some spiritual teachers say you should always, as a safeguard, give credit to your teacher or something other than yourself. You know, a lot of spiritual teachers will have a picture of their teacher behind them, or something of that nature, because otherwise one could begin taking it upon oneself that, you know, "I am the source of all this great stuff..."

Atreya: Right, right. And there's a reason why even at the end of Maharishi's life, someone showed him a picture of Krishna and he cried – he was crying. There's a reason for that! And it should be truly understood and investigated, because he is sort of the poster child of our century, so why would he *cry* when someone shows him a picture? Because of his intense *love*, those were tears of absolute love, like seeing your child born.

Through many, many decades of loving devotion, even he who absolved into it still never forgot his roots of what he aspired to, possibly, before he actually merged into it, and also how it was revealed to him in concrete form.

Rick: As far as I'm aware, pretty much all of the great nondualists always maintained some devotional relationship to something higher than or other than themselves, even if it had to be conjured up. Shankara said that, "Intellect imagines duality for the sake of devotion," and he had all these devotional prayers to the divine mother and so on. So it seems to be something they all do; they don't just say, "It's all one and I don't need to...", you know?

Atreya: Right, although that is an experience that you can experience, and once you do experience, you have that. But as long as you're in the flesh and you're in a body, there's always going to be some sense of needing that receptacle because you're always being refined. And basically, your life becomes refined by throwing things in that receptacle, that fire, and it is purified in that fire and it is given back to you completely integrated and shined up.

So maybe I could speak a little bit about that, because I remember sitting in meditation a lot – I still do – but I always remember imaging every thought that came into my mind and throwing into a fire, throwing it in there, and imagining myself on fire and everything that came up and touched me, burned up.

There are certain techniques you can do, like that one, to help create a system where you're going to forfeit, surrender everything that comes up. It's not the end all be all, but practices like

that *do* help, because it helps change your brain into giving it an outlet for that stuff, rather than trying to wrestle with it, you're not trying to understand it. Because sometimes you don't need to understand things; you just need to throw it out!

That you don't have to sometimes pick through all of that stuff; sometimes you just need to get to a place where you're just willing to give it up, even if it's for 30 seconds – maybe that's all it takes sometimes. It's like, "You know what, for the next 30 seconds I'm just going to throw everything out. I can come back to that stuff."

Rick: There's a saying, "Thy gifts my Lord I surrender to thee."

Atreya: Yeah, yeah. I wrote in *Revealing the Christ*, which is basically all just Jesus's words, but it's commentary on that, and the reason why I was inspired to write that was because I was fielding so many questions about Jesus and I didn't really know much. I went through a really short phase, maybe a few months of really intensely trying to understand the Bible. It was just too much, it was like picking through too much stuff, at the time. But I wanted to really try to understand his message, and that's why I wrote the book, is to apply whatever I was feeling that stillness in me to really look at his words.

Rick: Well on that note, Mark from Santa Clara asks, "Of the quotes attributed to Jesus, which did you find penetrated your heart most directly?"

Atreya: Jesus in the Book of Matthew, it kind of opens up with him being baptized and he goes straight to the desert, and for 40 days he basically goes through an awakening – a death of the ego. Jesus experienced two deaths: he experienced the one on the cross and he experienced one in the beginning, in the desert, where he had to surrender the 'me.'

So for me, the first thing he says when he comes out of the desert is, "Repent," which means turn away, "for the Kingdom is at hand." So for me that was pretty powerful, because it sums up his whole teaching. The first thing he said was, basically, "Turn away." Turn away from what? Turn away from everything that stands as an exclusive barrier to that nonexclusive Kingdom.

Rick: Could mean turn within, like, "The Kingdom of heaven is within," right?

Atreya: Exactly. So repent means turn away, turn away from the outer and look inward. So turn away from seeking experiences through the senses, through the body as desire, pleasure. You know, Jesus says a lot of good things like, "Be perfect." A lot of Christians are like, "I can't be perfect, I can't be perfect." Jesus said, "Be perfect like your Father in heaven," that's pretty big. We can strive for that. If you really want that, I think the intense spiritual seeker has a little bit of OCD type affectionism in them.

I've had this conversation with a psychologist. I said that the OCD-mind really is the spiritual seeker - they have [that] tool, because it takes that sort of laser beam type intention to really get at it.

Rick: Yeah, also I think if you think about what that might mean – does it mean perfect health, does it mean perfect athletic ability, does it mean perfect saintliness? It could mean getting in touch with that level of intelligence which is orchestrating the whole universe which if we look closely enough, it's perfect.

Atreya: Perfect, right, exactly, because It includes all things and It knows how to use all things for homeostasis, even if it seems out of balance. If that Intelligence is dictating your actions, like you said, you just get out of the way, you take your hands off the wheel and just have the humility and surrender and faith, and that's extremely difficult.

So if you look at Jesus's message, it is extremely radical even to this day, if you *really* look at it. So that's why I wrote the book and as you can see, it gets pretty deep. It's pretty intense the way it's interpreted, because I interpreted it basically as him telling you to come in contact with death – you have to “Pick up your cross ... follow.”

Rick: Here's an interesting question that came in from Amy in Norfolk, England – the British are very inquisitive, we get most of our questions from there. “What would your advice be if you found yourself stuck in the chicken and egg scenario of trying to get past the separate self, and yet knowing it's *only* a separate self who would want to get past a separate self? What to do? Any advice? Help!”

Atreya: Right, that's the witness stage, where you're waking up every day with the ego, but you know you're not the ego but it's there, and this and that. I would say, continue on and again, create a receptacle, whatever it is, create a relationship and just pour that into it too. Every time stuff like that arises and you feel that conflict, surrender that. Create some sort of system or model for yourself that works for you, where you say, “You know what, I'm going to give that up too” – just a constant falling away, allowing to just let go of things.

And with enough perseverance, and this doesn't mean it's going to happen overnight, but if you stick with it long enough, eventually it is going to work, it has to, whether it's this lifetime or next lifetime ... a million lifetimes eventually.

Rick: Well to Amy's question, Ramana was fond of using a metaphor which a lot of other spiritual teachers have used, which is that, “It takes a thorn to remove a thorn.” Individual effort might seem ludicrous if there is no individuality, but that's the thorn, and you can pick out another thorn with that, if it is applied skillfully.

Or another metaphor is, you're standing in the middle of a big mud puddle and you want to get out of the mud. So you say to the guy on the outside of the mud puddle, “How do you get out of here?” And he says, “Take a step.” And you say, “Well yeah, you're asking me to put my foot in the mud again.” He says, “Well yeah, but you're heading in the right direction. Just take a step, and then take another one,” and eventually you go beyond any individual effort and nature will take over as it were, but maybe nature is doing it already.

Atreya: Right, and the end of seeking and all that is really a result of intense seeking. And I really want to clarify that because I feel like a lot of teachers say, "Stop seeking, stop seeking, accept all your feelings," and that's true and I think we need to do that. But there does need to be an abiding, lasting intensity to really seek the final Cause, seek the Source, and to actually want that relationship. And then once you come in contact with it, it *becomes* you; it actually becomes you, but until you actually have that actual contact with death, then you still have to go for it.

Rick: I think that what often happens is a de-description is offered as a prescription, you know what I mean? In other words, they have arrived at a state where they are not seeking anymore and there's a sort of self-sufficiency or contentment, and then they take a description of that state as a prescription to offer to other people: "Hey, just do this, be like this," but it's not appropriate for the person who has not yet arrived at that state.

Atreya: That's what I was saying at the beginning of the interview, is that all of the different teachings out there are valid but they are all like the A-B-Cs being mixed up – they're all there, all the letters are there, but they're all part of different levels.

Rick: They apply to different levels.

Atreya: And they haven't really been cohesive, not really been put in order yet. And so you listen to one teacher and he's talking from the fifth step, and this person is only at the first step, and yeah, that's right for the fifth step, but trying to apply it and skip the first four steps ... it's really difficult that way.

That's why it is really important to search on your own at first - go inward and see if you can discover that on your own. And that's the whole concept and [why] that really works of having that concrete receptacle or the idea of that 'Lord,' because then all you have to do is look to that. Just constantly look to that and then you find the guru within you, and you realize that you're the disciple, and then ultimately you realize that you are the disciple *and* the guru. But nevertheless, just be the disciple and create a personal, secret relationship with that Source; that's so personal and that brings down that grace.

Rick: And even there, in a way, you're talking about a stage. I mean, there are some teachers who say you don't need gurus, you don't need teachers – which is kind of ironic because teachers are saying this – but there might be a stage at which it is very appropriate and valuable for a person to have an external teacher. In fact, very high beings can still benefit from an external teacher, and some never drop their expressed appreciation for their teacher, you know, it's just always, "My teacher is the source of whatever I've gained."

But anyway, the point you made just then is really important, that different teachings for different levels. I think it is not as widely appreciated or understood as it needs to be and a lot of confusion results from that being the case.

Atreya: Yeah, because there is mixed intention, and like we said earlier, there has to be a full intention, a 100% intention. A lot of people, they want both - they want to keep their ego but also have the experience of what it's like to not, so they kind of want to have their cake and eat it too type of thing, and a lot of these teachers kind of push that out like they can offer that. And they do on one level, because if you could learn to accept all your feelings and stuff like that, that's good, that's going to help you, but just don't be deluded; it's not the *highest* state.

And maybe people say, "Well I don't want the highest state, I just want to manage my life." Well that's good, that's good, and there's plenty of teachers out there that can help you manage your life and to have one foot and the other, but death does wait at the end of everyone's life. And if you want to wait till then, then okay, but if you want to find out now, while you're living, well that's a whole different intensity, and that's pretty rare, you know?

But I think the world would be a better place, and when I say "better" - meaning less action taken out of self-preservation and desire - the world would be a better place if people even just got on that level, of just accepting feelings and stuff like that. So it's all working towards a better place, a better life, in general, for human beings.

So it's all good, it's just a matter of how far do you want to go? How truly, truly far do you want to go? And I'm not even sure if you even get to decide that, because as I said, when I was a kid, from the very beginning I felt like there was more, I can't say where that came from. I felt from a very, very young age like I was *already* primed to seek that out, and I don't know the why, I don't know the cause why I'm so intensely one-pointed in that direction.

Rick: You know, one step leads to the next. Wherever people are at, just take the next step and there's always a next horizon. I think on the one hand, never feel dejected because you are not as far along as somebody else seems to be, and on the other hand realize that there's always more to go. By comparison with beings that probably existed in this universe, even the greatest sages that we revere might be relative beginners, so that's the way I see it anyway, and it helps to keep you humble and keep you focused and moving right along.

Atreya: Yeah, and Shakespeare started off learning his A-B-Cs.

Rick: He did, yeah.

Atreya: Jimi Hendrix picked the guitar up for the first time, you know, he was illiterate on the thing, so it is a process. And I remember when I was really into Krishnamurti, I really believed that it *wasn't* a process, because Krishnamurti is always like, "It could happen now," you know, "It's now or never," type of thing, so I was like, "It's not a process." But in my understanding now, it truly is a process. That process may be really fast, it may be really slow - I'm not saying the degree of the process; it can happen overnight.

Rick: Well you know, there are people who hung around Krishnamurti for decades, who sat there in frustration because he spoke from his level of experience and they were sitting there in theirs, and he didn't necessarily have an effective means of bridging the gulf for them.

Atreya: Right, and when you think about his context, he was early 20th century, so he was just trying to breakdown some really heavy conditioning. You know, everyone's got top-hat on, everyone's got their suit, so the social conditioning was very, very tight. So for the times, his message was appropriate because he just needed to get people to think outside of the box, just let go of everything, don't even accept any religion, any religious ideas.

Rick: Sort of an iconoclast.

Atreya: Yeah, it's important.

Rick: And you know, I was thinking this a minute ago when you were saying something about Sir Isaac Newton saying that he stood on the shoulders of giants, a lot of people like Krishnamurti and others have broken a lot of ground now, and you know how ground is easier to dig up once it's been broken before.

We live in very interesting times, in such that even a little effort produces great results, there are people waking up right and left. I think it's a very conducive time and if one is interested in this and applies oneself, it will bear fruit.

Atreya: Right, and you think how long Krishnamurti taught for – like 60 years, so he really helped establish the ground, to get that soil ready so people don't have to reinvent the wheel; they can, like you said, stand on the backs of these great people, and not be ashamed at that!

Like there's this thing in the spiritual community like, "You know, I have to stand completely alone, I can't mention any teachers," or "I'm not a teacher," and it's like, no, give credit where credit is due and then learn to validate that in yourself. And eventually you come to a place where you turn away from all that and you have to let that go too, but that's way down the road. And that will come naturally, it will come as a result of your intense learning and intense seeking. The end of seeking, again, is the result of intense seeking, for the most part.

Rick: Yeah, takes a thorn to remove a thorn.

Atreya: Yeah.

Rick: Alrighty, well this is great, you and I could go on all day. Any final points that you'd like to make? Just wrap-up types of points.

Atreya: Sure. My suggestion to anyone is to make a list of things that you truly want, how would you like to see your life? What do you really, really want? If as a human being your capacity is 100%, what percentage goes to this, what percentage goes to that? And I'm not talking about 50%

goes into cooking dinner and stuff like that. I'm not talking about physical things; that's a whole different type of energy.

I'm talking about what is it that you intend to create and truly want forever? It's like, "We want dinner tonight," but then that's over and it's done, but what do you want more than anything? And just be honest with yourself, don't show anybody because you might be embarrassed or this or that, but just know for sure what it is you're actually, actually putting your energy into.

And if it's awakening that you truly want or the experience of the Source, you're pace towards that will be determined by how much you *exclusively* devote your energy to that. And I'm not talking about physical energy; I'm talking about mental energy. So you could allow the physical to go on, you can allow all that to go on, but while you're cooking dinner are you thinking? Are you inquiring in your mind? While you're changing a diaper, are you still thinking?

Because you start to see the Lord in all things. As you devote yourself to It, it tends to reveal Itself to you in *all* things. And I think that is the refinement part – coming in contact with yourself, the Lord, in all things, as you go along.

So to wrap it up, I would just say, ask yourself, "What do I really want?" And you will realize that it's an interesting question, because it is a difficult question to answer because it often changes – "I want this today, and I want that tomorrow." But find what you really, really want and go for it. Whatever it is, that's your spiritual path. You'll know what it is because when you get the idea it will just fill you with a tremendous amount of energy to do it. So I would say, start there.

And also another great place to start is just silence. So say, "You know what, I'm just going to be quiet. I'm going to tell my family," if you have a family, "Listen, this is what I'm doing" - don't just become this silent guy where you become aloof. But say, "Listen, you know, I feel really inspired to do this and for a couple of days I'm going to be silent," and explain to them what you're doing. That's a great place to start because when you're silent, again, you'll see where all that mental activity wants to invest its energy.

Rick: And if you can't do it in the midst of your family, maybe I would say try to take a little retreat and go off someplace for a weekend or a week, and maintain silence during that.

Atreya: But with the intention to discover your daily thought patterns, what seeds are you actually planting on a daily basis, mentally. And write that stuff down and take a look at it and say, "You know what, I'm not really sure this is what I truly want; I just kind of *fell* into this stuff over conditioning, over time, and maybe this is my *dad's* idea of what I'm supposed to be doing," you know? Just find out what you truly want.

You'll find it and it will eventually lead you back to the Source, it will lead you back to the Lord because all things come from that. And if you find the deepest connection to that, to what you truly feel your vocation is, then it'll lead you back to that.

Rick: That's great. Well I won't try to embellish on that; I think that was very clear and good advice to end with. So let me just make a few wrap-up points. I've been speaking with Atreya Thomas and as always, I'll create a page on www.batgap.com around this interview and some information there, including links to his website and his books. If you go to his website you'll find all kinds of other interesting things to read and how to get in touch with him, and so on.

You're a pretty busy guy. Do you do any kind of personal consultations with people or anything, do you have time for that?

Atreya: Yeah, I could. Yeah, whatever people want, just reach out to me. You'd be surprised how much time there actually is - even though I have the family and all these kids and stuff, I still find time to sit quietly or take walks a couple of hours a day, because I don't have any other intention besides doing just what I need to do and confront my daily life.

But you actually realize that you could always get up an hour earlier, or once the kids are in bed at 8 o'clock, you know, you have 2 hours. Most people find a mental activity to engage into; you could just sit if you want for an hour - from 8 o'clock to 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock, or whatever. There's plenty of time!

Rick: Yep, you've got the time, we've got the beer - there used to be an ad that said that. In any case, that's about it, so thanks for listening or watching. I really appreciate talking with you, it was a lot of fun. There are certain interviews where I feel like, "I don't want this to end, I want to just keep going." And people say, "Why do you have to go on for 2 and a half hours," but that's why, because I'm having so much fun.

And I hope that you all have too - both you and the people who have been watching us. There's a pretty good group on the live streaming thing. Thank you to all those who have been hanging with us through technical glitches and thanks to everyone else, and we'll see you next week.

Atreya: Thanks Rick.

Rick: Thanks Atreya

{BATGAP theme music playing}