

Rick: Welcome to Buddha at the Gas Pump. My name is Rick Archer and my guest today is Michael Dowd. Buddha at the Gas Pump is an ongoing series of interviews with spiritually awakening people. I've done nearly 300 of them now, and if you'd like to check out the archives, go to batgap.com, and you'll see them categorized in various ways, under the "Past Interviews" menu. There's also a "Donate" button there, and this show is made possible by the support of generous viewers.

Reverend Michael Dowd is a best-selling evolutionary theologian and pro-future evangelist, whose work has been featured in the New York Times, L.A. Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Newsweek, Discover, and on television – nationally.

His bridge-building book "Thank God for Evolution" was endorsed by six Nobel Prize winning scientists, noted skeptics, and by religious leaders across the spectrum. Michael and his science-writer wife, Connie Barlow, have spoken to more than 2,000 groups across North America since 2002. And they've done that because they live primarily out of a camper van, and they're just on the road continuously.

Michael has delivered two TedX Talks and a program at the United Nations. In 2010 he interviewed 38 Christian leaders across the theological spectrum - all of whom embrace an ecological, evolutionary worldview and are committed to a healthy future - as part of a series entitled, "The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity."

Most recently he interviewed 55 experts on climate change, peak oil, and sustainability, as part of an online conversation series titled, "The Future is Calling Us to Greatness."

Dowd's passion for proclaiming a pro-science message of inspiration - what he calls "the Gospel of right relationship to reality," has earned him the moniker "Reverend Reality". As he speaks prophetically in secular and religious settings alike about the generational evil of anti-future, anti-Christian policies, and the necessity of co-creating a just, healthy, and sustainably life-giving future for humanity and the larger body of life.

So Michael, welcome.

RMD: Thank you Rick, good to be here.

Rick: I've spent a marvelous week, listening to hours and hours and hours of your talks -that you've given in the past, Connie's talks, even some Thomas Barry talks and poems that he was reading -all sorts of things. And reading some articles that you've written and reading a good chunk of your book, and I must say that everything you talk about really excites me. I mean, I literally got goose-bumps at times.

I think what you're doing is really important, and so I'm thrilled to have this conversation with you.

RMD: Cool. Well I've been looking forward to this Rick.

Rick: Good. So, there's so much to cover – I feel. You cover so much in the things you say. And I really want to do justice to it and make sure that both [of us] after this interview say, "Wow, we really nailed it. We got everything in there." So don't let me lead you astray, or down little side-alleys. You know, make sure that we're covering everything that is dear to your heart, and most important.

And maybe the best way of starting to do that is for you to just start by the highest first – if we could call it [that]. If this was a one minute interview, what would you want to start with?

RMD: That we're in the largest transformation of religious sensibility in, perhaps, human history - a second axial age – I call it "the evidential reformation." Where all the religions of the world are coming to realize that there is no future for humanity or for their faith, if we don't come into a right relationship to reality, which includes coming into a right relationship to nature, and time.

It's exciting... I sometimes say, "Reality is my God, evidence is my scripture, and ecology is my theology." Said another way, any understanding of God that doesn't include what we, today, mean by the word 'reality', isn't God.

Reality is Lord. That's not a belief; it's a fact. That is, everything submits to and is accountable to what today we would call 'reality'. What's real, whether you believe it or not. And any understanding of scripture that doesn't include evidence is not God's word! Evidence is the main way reality is revealing truth to us today. Not only the evidence of our own experience, but also scientific, historic, and cross-cultural evidence. So that needs to be lifted up at a realm of Divine revelation, or God's word, or scripture.

And then any understanding of theology that doesn't include ecology – that is, the science of living in a right relationship to time and nature – to the aspects of reality that are inescapably real, is also a theology that our grandchildren will condemn us for. So it's the greening of religion, but also that has to happen for us to green the economic system.

We have an economic system that's demonic. In fact, I just wrote a blog post last week called, "When Religions Fail, Economics Becomes Demonic." And what I mean is – it's not another world – what I mean is a system that rewards the few at the expense of the many, and forces all of us to harm the future. I mean, if the word 'demonic' has any meaning in a modern world, it's got to include that. And we have an economic system that does exactly that. It measures progress and growth and success, by how fast we can take nature and turn it into pollution, and in the process condemn the future - so, the distinction between pro-future and anti-future.

We're at the place now where all our institutions and activities, and theologies, and religions – everything needs to be discerned by: "does this assist humans coming into a mutually-enhancing relationship with the natural world, or does it hinder, or harm the future?" - so, pro-future versus anti-future.

And when I speak in Christian context I say, pro-Christian, or Christian – that is, saving the future, or anti-Christian – that which is condemning the future.

Rick: It's ironic that a lot of Christians deny climate change, and so we'll get into that and the underpinnings of why that might be.

Well one thing I heard you talk about quite a bit, in various talks, was the notion of God as external to nature, external to the universe, kind of a Divine clockmaker – to use that metaphor, and thereby viewing the universe as mechanistic, and sort-of devoid of the Divine essence, if you will. Versus seeing God as imminent and seeing, “everything is in God, and God is in everything” – there's just no separation, it's a seamless merging. Kind of like water and a sponge, although even more than that, because I would go on to say that it's not just water and a sponge, but that the sponge and the water are both God.

So maybe we could play on that a little bit, and how that world-view has created so much trouble.

RMD: Yeah, exactly. Well you know, what you're pointing to is that our metaphors matter. The analogies and metaphors that we use for reality, matter. They shape our attention and put our consciousness on a certain track. They can be either life-giving and pro-future, or life-damaging and anti-future. And our concepts of God can do the same thing. In fact, secular people are attacking many – some of the new atheists and secular folks – are often attacking religion and saying; religion is a problem because they even *have* a God-concept. Well, I suggest that's missing the point too.

The word “God” can either be thought of as pointing to some supernatural entity, who lives off the planet and outside the universe, who blesses some and smites others. That's a trivial, impotent, inconsequential god. Or, the word “God” could be understood from a science-based way. The one science-based way of understanding of God is that all god talk, all gods and goddesses are personifications. That is, giving human characteristics to something that's inescapably real. I mean, Poseidon wasn't the god of the oceans; Poseidon wasn't the spirit of the oceans. Poseidon was a personification of the incomprehensibly powerful and capricious seas.

Gaia was a *personification* of Earth, not the *goddess* of the Earth, not the spirit of the Earth. Helios was not a god of the sun, but a personification of this inescapably real reality that gives us light! So if the word “God” is not personifying inescapable reality, then it's a trivial god that actually... if we think we can worship God and trash the environment, or treat others in an unjust way, we're out of touch with our reality. So our concepts of God matter. And yes, as you say, this idea pointing out that –I say this a lot – that if we think of God as a clockmaker, outside a clockwork universe, which is pretty much the world view we've had in the last 500 years – we're going to be: A – desecrating nature. Nature is no longer a vow to be related to and honored and respected. Nature's an “it” that we can exploit, or we think we can exploit and use for our benefit, with no consequences to us – that's a catastrophic mistake. It also trivializes God. God is no longer imminent and omnipresent – you know, there's no place that God stops and something else starts; but God is thought of as a being outside a clockwork universe that you can either believe in – theism, or disbelieve in – atheism.

And so you've got this debate, thousands or maybe millions of people that are debating whether or not God exists, or whether or not God is real, when the one real God – namely, Reality – personified or not –

we're been out of right relationship to, and we're now about to experience consequences of Biblical proportion. So our views of God seriously matter.

That's why I like the nesting doll – like Russian nesting dolls. This is a fundamental truth that we know through science, through evidential revelation. Is that the universe, or reality, is comprised of nested spheres of creativity. Subatomic particles within atoms, within cells, within organisms, you know, and so on and so forth, all the way out. And so any understanding of God that doesn't include a name for that one and only creative reality that includes all others, yet also transcends all others, is a god that doesn't deserve to be honored and in fact, will lead us down a destructive path.

Rick: There are about four main points in there that I want to go into, in depth with you.

RMD: Sure.

Rick: And probably when I start going into the first one, you'll give me four other main points, because this stuff is so great.

RMD: I'll keep my answers shorter!

Rick: No, it's alright, it's alright. We'll get to them all. The first is, one thing that amazes me and always has, is the scientists and surgeons and people like that, who look really closely at nature, could be atheist, or could regard what they're seeing as mechanistic. Because, I mean, you look at anything close...it's easy to take stuff for granted if you just waltz through your day you know, just living your life, doing your stuff, but if you start looking closely through a telescope, through a microscope, with an educated understanding, you start seeing this miracle in every cell and every galaxy. I mean, there's this incredible thing going on. How can that be random billiard balls running into each other?

RMD: Yeah, but see, I've gotta jump in here Rick, because you know, I don't often find myself in the position of defending atheists, but I'm going to have to in this moment. Most nonreligious people, or people who don't feel comfortable with traditional God talk because it's all this other-worldly, supernatural stuff, if all the people in your life who use God talk use it in a way of a supernatural Being, who is on the side of this group of people and condemning this group of people, then an atheist is simply someone who says, "I don't believe in that Being."

Rick: Yeah, no, I agree with that.

RMD: But most atheists and secular people that I know, that are really into the science, they don't see it as billiard balls; they see this emergentist perspective. Michael Shermer is a friend of mine – head of Sceptic Magazine. You know, Connie's known Richard Dawkins for decades. I mean, these are people who don't have a mechanistic world view; they're emergentists. That is, it's not either determined – God pre-ordained it and put it all together, or chance; it's creative. We have a creative reality, a creative cosmos that emerges. A greater complexity keeps emerging out of lesser complexity. So I just feel a little awkward because I don't want to be dissing people, saying that they believe this and how could they be so dumb and stupid, because that's really is not what they believe anyway.

Rick: No, that's good to know and I appreciate that. I try to get an interview with Sam Harris. I'm going to keep trying. But one of the things I said in my letter to him is, I don't believe in the same god you don't believe in.

RMD: Yeah, right, exactly.

Rick: So what do these people – Shermer and Dawkins and Harris and so on, if you could speak on their behalf – what do they make of this creativity that they see, this emerging creativity? What do they think that is?

RMD: They basically think that it's reality, it's holy, it's sacred, it's whatever...but they don't attribute some supernatural intelligence to be the one who created it. They see the whole thing as Divine. I mean, some of them wouldn't use the word "Divine", but they see the whole thing as worthy of our deepest respect and honor, and commitment.

Frankly, this isn't necessarily a direction I'm that interested in because, we don't have time to convert each other over the issues of theology or metaphysics. We need to redesign our economic systems, globally, which is going to take a level of cooperation across ethnic, religious, political differences, in the service of a healthy future. Otherwise, we are literally condemning our children and grandchildren to hell and high water.

So my focus lately, the last two and half years, has been really big on climate change. Which I don't even call it global warming; I call it radiation entrapment, and that's what it is. It's radiation -solar radiation - and we're entrapped by it. And that radiation entrapment is going to be creating a lot of chaos. Every place isn't going to get warmer as the United States experienced last year. As a direct result of radiation entrapment, we had the coldest winter on record, practically. And Alaska was baking with the hottest winter on record.

Rick: Sure, because the jet stream was pushed around ...the polar vortex

RMD: Exactly. [The jet stream] was doing this loopy stuff and, it's global wierding! But because one season may be brutally cold, the next season may be brutally hot, the next season may be brutally dry, the next season may be brutally wet – that's global wierding, and that's going to screw up the climate patterns. It's going to make it very difficult to have food that feeds as many people as need to be fed.

And so I'm tending these days to focus a lot less on theology and metaphysics, and a lot more on: "Okay, we don't agree on that? No problem, let's set that aside. What can we agree on so that we can work together to ensure a healthy future?" That's sort of the bottom line for me these days.

Rick: But one thing I think you're doing though, is you feel that the more fundamental a level that you can operate, the more effectively we can change things - you know, the principle of the fulcrum. And so, what can we get down to that will shift the course of... you know, I mean an ocean liner has a little rudder in the back - little compared to the size of the ship – if that turns just a little bit, the whole ship turns.

So if we want to really change people's behavior, what's the most influential, what's the most pivotal level at which we can function in order to do that? And I think that when we can ask that question, we have addressed the metaphysics a little bit - changes in our deepest understandings of the way nature works are going to ripple up, in terms of the way we behave.

RMD: Exactly. No, I completely agree. My only point is that if what we need to do is live individually and collectively in such a way, that decade by decade the soil is getting healthier, decade by decade the carbon is being reduced from the atmosphere, that decade by decade the forests are getting healthier. In other words, if that's what we need to do, there's gonna be lots of different metaphysical and theological and philosophical ways of getting there. There's not going to be one right way - the only way to think about the nature of reality - that helps us live in a right relationship to reality.

Now I personally am rather passionate about what I call 'the path of factual faith' or 'sacred realism'. I'm a religious naturalist. I have no supernatural or other-worldly beliefs. But that's just my world view. There are close friends of mine who do have supernatural, other-worldly beliefs from a lot of different traditions, and yet they're also committed to permaculture, sustainability, reducing our carbon footprint, living more lightly on the planet.

Rick: So what's the common denominator between you and those friends?

RMD: We're all pro-future. We're all pro-nature and pro-future. That is, our individual lifestyles and our collective impact on the natural world - on what I call 'primary reality.' I mean, primary reality is that which gives birth to life, that which sustains and nurtures life, and that which receives life at its end. And whether you call that god or the goddess, or universe or cosmos, or whatever - Buddha nature - we are all part of that, what I call Divine reality and we need to honor it as Divine.

So we have not for the last few hundred years been honoring the soil, the water, the air, the forests, and other life forms as Divine, as sacred, or as precious, or as worthy of our deepest respect. We've been treating all of that as merely resources for us to use, and it's a short-sighted vision of the future. The fact that we allow corporations, for example, to buy a hundred acres of land, build all these factories, put all their waste into that soil, and then move to some foreign country without being responsible for putting that land back in the way it was beforehand, is insanity! We have an economic system that's insane because it's all about using nature, with short-term lenses.

We're not thinking in terms of the seventh generation, that we should behave and act and decide, and live our lives in the present in a way that's a blessing for seven generations. We've been so unsustainable. And the word unsustainable and the word evil, they both point to the same thing! God's fundamental law, that is, Life's fundamental law for all species is: don't live in the present in a ways that diminish or destroy the future. But we're doing exactly that and we have to shift that. And I think we're going to need a lot of people. We're going to need Christians, and Buddhists, and Hindus, and Jews, and atheists, and everybody to work together to move forward. That's why I'm more interested in that practical stuff.

Rick: Yeah. And so I guess one question would be, why do we do that? I mean, what is it about our corporate mentality, or collective mentality that causes us to destroy nature and squander our resources without regard for future consequences?

RMD: Well that's a really good question Rick, and I don't know that I have a great answer, but I have done some thinking on this.

Rick: Because if we're going to stop doing it, it might help to know why we're doing it.

RMD: Right. Well one of the things, as Martin Buber, the famous Jewish theologian said, decades and decades ago, that if we treat nature as merely an "it" to be used and exploited by us, rather than [as a] "thou" to be honored and respected in its own right, he said, not only is the Divine not present, but that we will cause our own extinction.

We can no longer afford to do that. Nature *will* be respected or we will suffer the consequences. Not like nature's a cute bunny that needs our protection, no. Nature is the presence of God, and if we don't begin to respect – we don't humble ourselves and respect – the natural systems upon which we depend - the carbon cycles, the nitrogen cycles, the carbon-dioxide... Basically, we have to learn from nature as if nature is the voice of God, and if nature's laws are God's laws, and we either need to abide by those laws or we suffer the consequences. We will create the hell for ourselves and our children.

So I think the biggest thing is to learn ecology. I think ecology is the new theology. And different people, different religious traditions will come at it in different ways, but the science of ecology, the science of learning to live within limits – God is in the limits! We have to honor ecological limits. This idea that we can have an everlasting, growing economy, when the quality of the air, water, soil, and life upon which that economy depends is declining. So the primary economy of nature is decreasing, contracting in health and vitality and vibrancy, and yet we think we can have a never ending – it's insane.

So that's what we can agree on, it's to learn ecological principles. That's why I consider the single most important book in print today, to be this book: William Catton's book "Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change." It's written in 1980 and I consider it, not only the most important book in the 20th Century, but it's currently the most important book, in my opinion, in print. Because...

Rick: More important than the Bible, I suppose.

RMD: Well, I treat this like modern-day scripture! I treat this that... God, Reality, is speaking through William Catton - and it's not just me. The interesting thing is, if you just put "William Catton tribute", my page comes right up, and I've got quotes and longer tributes from these *amazing* scientists and environmentalists who were, virtually all of them saying, that this is one of the top two or three most significant books they've ever read in their life. And some of them, like Derrick Jenson says, it's the most important book of the 20th Century.

Rick: Not only that, but you have you and Connie reading it on your website, don't you? One can listen.

RMD: Yes, I've unofficially recorded the audio of this, and I only give it out to a few close friends.

Rick: Oh, sorry.

RMD: Well, I actually called the publisher and it looks like they're going to have me do it. So there will be an official audio book, with me going into a studio and doing it. But the version that I have up online right now, you can hear like – there's three chapters where at the end of the chapter, you can literally hear me crying, and Connie crying on the couch, because we were that moved by this book. But yes, William Catton, *Overshoot*, I highly, highly recommend it.

Rick: Great. Let me come back to "I and thou," I think it's a key thing. And I think we can take it a step further, because if God is really omnipresent, then there is nowhere where He – and I'll just say He for convenience sake – is not. And therefore ultimately, the reality of creation is a unified wholeness. "I and thou" still sounds rather dualistic to me. It sounds better than "I and it," but it's still rather dualistic. And so, when we are destroying the rainforest, it's not just that we're destroying God's lungs; we're destroying our own lungs. You know, when we're poisoning the rivers and oceans, we're not just poisoning God's blood; we're poisoning our own blood.

And that's an even greater intimacy, I think, with nature, than thinking of "I and thou," where there's some distance between, you know ...

RMD: Just gawking at itself like whoa, you know? A biology student looking in a microscope is the planet Earth learning with awareness, with consciousness, how it's functioned unconsciously and instinctually for billions of years. So there's that you know, I am that, thou art that, that whole sense. Absolutely that's a sense, that nature's not separate from me, that I am.

As John Seed says, you know, "I am not John Seed protecting the rainforest. I'm the rainforest protecting itself through John Seed."

Rick: Yeah, ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.

RMD: Yeah, exactly. So yes, absolutely, there's how we think about the Divine, and how we think about our relationship to nature. There are times when I am so present, outside symbolic language; I'm just in the experience of this oneness, this "I am this reflecting on itself." I am no different from it, I'm completely a part of it. And for me to protect nature is the same intimacy as if I stopped you from trying to cut off my arm -it's like ME we're talking about.

And there's also the "I, thou", where that's the Divine other – there's some of the humility that comes - that this larger reality gave me birth. And then there's also the "I, it", which is [that] there's times where we actually think of resources in terms of copper, or gold, or silver, or food – you know, where we get our food – and we can step into that "I, I" and "I, thou" as well. But I think all three of these ways of thinking need to be honored, and so I appreciate you for pointing that out, because I think it is vital. I think it's important.

Rick: I think that's what Christ may have meant when he said, "Whatever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me." Any of us could say that actually.

It's like, whatever we doing to anything, we're doing it to ourselves.

RMD: Right, exactly.

Rick: Don't worry, we're going to keep coming back to ecology and climate change and all that. It's very important to me. I just want to touch on the personification point that you made a little bit.

RMD: Great, I was hoping you'd come back to that. That's great.

Rick: Ok, great. Perhaps you could just quickly recapitulate what you said about that, and that will give me a springboard for asking you a question or two.

RMD: Sure. If I were to try to describe what I consider to be the single most important scientific discovery about religion in the last hundred years – and I know that's a big claim I'm making, but I think it's true – it can be summed up in the one word, "personification", or "personalizing."

That is, we now know – again, we don't believe this; we know this – that our brains are inherently relational. We can't not relate. Our brains are instinctually programmed to relate. And we typically relate through human categories.

Throughout human history we've treated the river, or the soil, or the oceans, or whatever, in a personified way. And all gods and goddesses are personifications, not persons. And as I said, Helios – what Connie and I call "Great Sol" –S-o-l. So we don't relate to what most people call "the sun" – little s; we relate to that reality as "Great Sol."

So in the morning we sing, {singing} "Hi, hi, Great Sol" – we've got this little song that we sing. And then at night we sing, {singing} "Bye, bye, Great Sol" – that's a little song that we do.

Nora is our personification of North America. We don't call this continent North America; we call this reality Nora. That is, we give human characteristics to this continent. And we have this intimate, personal, love relationship with this continent.

Angel is our van. We personify our van as Angel. It's our bedroom on wheels. We actually don't have an R.V.; we live out of the generosity of others who open up their homes to us, and we've got, sort of, our bedroom on our back – in Angel.

But we also personify our relationship. There's Connie, there's Michael, and then there's Jasmine. And Jasmine is the mythic personification that we've given to us, or to we. And sometimes it's really clear what Michael wants to do, and it's clear what Connie wants to do. But when one of us asks the question, "What does Jasmine want in this situation?", it allows me, as a man, to not be attached to my position. And I can even go with something Connie might have suggested in the first place, but I don't feel like she's won and I've lost. I feel like I'm proud that I'm doing what's good for Jasmine.

So this personification is so vital, because – here’s a classic example. This is actually a really good example. If I think of gods, if I think of God, or any god or goddess throughout human history as a separate, nonmaterial entity floating around somewhere, then I’m going to miss the power of the personification. I’m going to miss the inescapable reality. Like I say, Helios is an inescapably real. Poseidon is inescapably real. Gaia is inescapably real. You don’t have to personify those realities, but the realities they point to are inescapably real. And that’s why I love that fact that Hollywood has just gotten with the program in a major way!

Anybody watching or listening to this, just put “nature is speaking.com”.

Rick: Yeah, I think I saw those, it’s great.

RMD: And there’s these videos that have been done. Julia Roberts, for instance, speaks *as* Mother Nature. She doesn’t speak *about* nature; she’s nature, given voice. Harrison Ford speaks *as* the oceans - you could say that’s the voice of Poseidon today. And I mean, these kick butt! Some of these videos have had millions of view. They’ve gone viral because they tap into the power of personification. And so for me, God is a personification of reality.

I put it this way: God is reality with a personality, not a person outside reality.

Rick: So Uncle Sam personifies the United States. Santa Claus personifies Christmas.

RMD: Well no, Santa Claus doesn’t really personify Christmas. Santa Claus in some ways personifies the generous spirit, or whatever. But Santa Claus is less of a personification than say, Uncle Sam. Could you imagine how bizarre it would be if you walk into a room, and you hear two people debating whether or not Uncle Sam is real, or whether or not Uncle Sam exists?

Your first thought was, they don’t get it. Uncle Sam is a personification of the government. Of course the government is real, but of course it’s not literal.

Rick: But we all assume, when we talk about Santa Claus or Uncle Sam, that there really is no such person. It’s just a symbol, or a representation...

RMD: A personification.

Rick: So that’s what you’re saying with regard to Jasmine, there is no such thing as Jasmine...

RMD: But this is it. I want to stay with this for just a second. There really is.

Rick: Well that’s what I would argue.

RMD: Relationships are real! There is a reality. Whether we call that reality Jasmine or not, there is a relationship between me and Connie that is not just our differences. It’s the whole that is more than the sum of the parts, or the whole that is different from the sum of its parts. And by giving that reality a name, it allows us to have a healthier relationship *to* that reality.

So by giving North America, the continent of North America, a mythic name, we have a more intimate, personal relationship. And by giving what's inescapably real, like what's real whether you believe it or not – and I think time, nature, mystery, whatever else reality is, it at least includes time, nature, and mystery. So for me, God is inescapably, undeniably real – or the goddess, whatever you want to call it. But for us, the word God is like a name, a proper name, a sacred name for reality as a whole. And the first thing that we know when we study, when we learn about reality, is that there are limits that are real.

In fact, what I sometimes think is that the ecological limits, by not honoring our ecological limits, that we're creating hell. That's why I interpret the mythic story of the fall of Adam and Eve, not as the disobedience of one human being disobeying God, but humanity dishonoring God's limits. God says, "Ok, all this is cool. Stay away from that tree." That's God's limit. We dishonored that limit, and by dishonoring the limits of nature, the ecological limits, we take ourselves *off* the path of paradise, and we put ourselves *on* the path of hell. And that's what we're doing now. And the only way of salvation – again, using mythic language – but the only way of salvation is to come back into right relationship to reality, and that's the path of integrity.

And so for me, Christ is not a supernatural person floating around somewhere; Christ is the incarnation, or embodiment, or personification - a personification of integrity. You may think there's some path to right relationship to reality that by-steps integrity, you're deceived. There's no way.

And so Satan is not some disembodied spook; Satan is a personification of everything that would lead us, or could lead us, to be out of right relationship to reality. Everything that would lead us to be anti-future, personified. So from that vantage point, Satan and Christ are inescapably real. They're not supernatural beings; they're personifications of that which would have us destroy the future, or that which would have us save, or help, or be a blessing to the future.

Rick: Cool. I want to stay on this personification thing for a bit.

RMD: Cool.

Rick: And I think it also relates to nested creativity, in the sense that, like a jelly fish is more than the sum of all the little things that make it up, or our body - ten thousand trillion cells - is more than the sum of all its parts. It can do things and know things, and whatnot, that no individual cell can do.

I would suggest that there's a collective consciousness to you and Connie - that you call Jasmine - which is more than the sum of you and Connie. And the same holds true of families, towns, nations, the world. You get, sort of, wholenesses that are more than the sum of their parts, at every level. So that's one point.

RMD: Yeah, well before you go on, because it's a really important point. A dear friend and colleague of mine, who died just a few years ago, Walter Wink – W-I-N-K – he wrote a series of books on naming the powers and gauging the powers. And what the series was all about - what the Apostle Paul and others in the New Testament in the Christian Scriptures refer to as "powers and principalities" - were

personifications of what we would call corporate personhood, or corporate personality. I mean cities - if you would personify a city or personify a corporation - that is, a group of people making decisions collectively, there's a whole new level of evil that's possible, where you get the ruling elite that tilt the playing field in their favor. All the laws and things are in their favor.

And today we use secular language of course, to talk about that, but when the Apostle Paul in the New Testament and Christian Scriptures speaks about powers and principalities, he's speaking, basically, of the personality of this city, or the personality of that city, or the personality of Rome, or whatever.

Rick: And they do have personalities. I mean, you go to a different city, a whole different feeling.

RMD: Exactly.

Rick: On this point on personification, I don't think we've milked everything we can out of it yet, and I want to throw something in that might be a stretch for you, but maybe not. And that is, that when we talk about the vastness of the universe let's say, and the vastness of time, in a way it's like, to me, it's like talking about the vastness of the Pacific Ocean by measuring its breadth and width, without taking into consideration its depth.

And what I mean by that is that, in addition to the spatial and temporal vastness, there are subtler strata of creation, subtler dimensions. I think this relates to your nested creativity thing, but perhaps in a way you may or may have not considered. The whole historical talk of angels, for instance, to me is not mythical; it's literal, and it has to do with the fact that some people were able to perceive the subtler strata of creation on which such beings reside. And I have many friends alive today, whom I talk with regularly, for whom that's the norm, as normal as it is for you and I to see people walking around the mall. They see them everywhere, and they commune with them sometimes and are told things, and this and that. And these are normal people running business, and stuff.

So when we talk about personification, I would suggest that when you have something like the sun – Helios, or Sol, or Suria – the Hindus called it, it's not only a hydrogen-fusion reaction, but it's actually an embodiment of intelligence, intelligence that's taken a concrete form. And that concrete form, on the gross level, has its corresponding strata on subtler and subtler levels, such that that form can actually be a conscious being.

So Gaia can actually be a conscious being, Suria can be a conscious being, with bodies – very unlike what we consider to be life-sustainable, you know, biological bodies – but which is as much a conscious being as we are. And this would kind of apply to the large and the small, and all sorts of different things. How does that strike you with regard to what you've been thinking about personification?

RMD: There's a couple of things. One is that that is a physical perspective that some people find tremendously inspiring, and it matches their own experience. There are others, for whom either metaphysically or experientially, they've not had that experience. They don't see or interpret the world that way, or they would interpret those, sort of, in a more metaphorical way, or whatever.

I don't have a stance in terms of the rightness or wrongness. My hunch is that most angels and fairies, and spirits and spiritual entities, are again, personifying some relationship that's actually quite real. And that there is value for people for whom those experiences are real and that helps them live in right relationship with the water, the air, the soil, and the life forms of their bio-region. Man, I am a deep bow of gratitude and honor of that.

But to those people for whom those spiritual experiences cause them to discount nature, or discount the importance of living in a sustainable, life-giving, mutually enhancing way with their bio-region, then I think it can be problematic.

So I view that towards any spiritual or metaphysical beliefs or experiences. I mean, people can have profoundly real, subjective experiences where God or Reality tells them to go in this direction. Well how do you discern whether that's your own self-deceptive nature, whether that's your addictive nature, whether that's all the kinds of things that could be harmful to others, or harmful to yourself, or harmful to the natural world?

I mean, okay, I have a profound, inescapably real, subjective experience that tells me to go kill this person. Well, on what basis? So we have to honor that one of the things that God, Reality, has been revealing through evidence - through evolutionary psychology and evolutionary brain science, among other disciplines - is that we have self-deceptive instincts, and that's why we need the collective.

Scientists are just as prone to self-deception as anybody else. But the *community* of scientists, where there's motivation, where there's incentive to prove each other wrong, is usually a good thing in the long run, in terms of helping our theories and our understandings of reality come into closer alignment with the way reality really is.

Rick: Now, I agree. And obviously, someone could be saying something and it sounds like they're having mystical experiences and they could be psychotic or something.

RMD: Right, and one of the things that again, for me, the great, sacred responsibilities that we have as humans, is the responsibility to interpret life in ways that serve our larger communities, in ways that serve the future, and in so doing, also serve us. So there's that interpreting life generously, or mythically, or relationally interpreting life - because we don't experience reality as it is.

We experience reality through the lenses of our interpretation that can't be distinguished, because we live in a world of symbolic language. And so all animals interpret, in fact you could probably argue that all plants interpret, but certainly when you start moving into the realm of symbolic language - that is, words that create worlds by how we interpret, our interpretations matter.

And so if I interpret the universe is out to get me, if I interpret the universe is conspiring against me, or reality, or whatever, and those are the lenses through which I interpret, then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even if somebody's nice to me, I'm going to interpret it like, "Yeah, what are they out to get?" I become cynical, skeptical. But if I interpret that the universe is conspiring on my behalf, it's just an interpretation, but I'm going to filter through that. So even when difficult, challenging, painful things

happen, rather than judge it or say, “Ah, why is life condemning me?” it’s like, oh okay, how’s this God blessing me in disguise? How is this the universe conspiring on my behalf? How can I grow, or learn, or evolve through this?

It’s not like one is true and one’s not, it’s just that one is profoundly serving of my life and the world, and so I choose to interpret that the universe is conspiring on my behalf. I don’t honestly think I can argue and compellingly convince my friend Michael Shermer that that’s the case objectively, but what I can say confidently is I know that’s the most kick-ass way to live my life. Because if I live my life as if the universe is conspiring on my behalf, I love my life and the people around me find me to be a more generous, compassionate person that gets over difficulties really quick. Because I’m filtering through ‘how’s life conspiring on my behalf?’ It’s just a useful stance, but for me it’s one of the most useful stances that there is.

Rick: No, me too. And if you see life as having this sort of, evolutionary imperative toward higher expressions of creativity, higher consciousness, or however you like to define it, then you see everything as ultimately being in service of that, and it makes the universe a lot more friendly a place.

RMD: Right, but there’s a difference. If I take it as an objective metaphysical truth rather than a subjectively empowering, useful belief, is a big difference. I know a lot of friends - several very close friends – in the new age new-thought movement. They’re now in bankruptcy, they’re now in crisis because they were living beyond their means. But they had this magical view that the universe you know – if they just had the right beliefs, then the universe is going to be like this bank-machine that’s going to keep flowing blessings. And I think the universe would just as soon kill us.

I don’t think the universe cares one way or the other about us as individuals. But if I act as if the universe does care, then I’m going to live my life in a generous way. But the important thing is – again, this is what God, this is what Reality is revealing through evidence – we know of 24 complex civilizations in the last 5,000 years. There may be others that we just don’t have the evidence for, but we know of 24 complex civilizations. They all rise differently, but they all fall the same.

There’s certain patterns where what happens is, a civilization or empire grows beyond what it can afford to maintain and starts feeding on itself - it’s called catabolic collapse. And in the early stages of catabolic collapse, virtually all the evidence that we have is that people believe that evolution – or, if they didn’t have the word evolution, let’s just say history – was sort of, all leading to them, they’re the pinnacle of evolution. And they’re not aware that they’re about to experience 400 years of contraction, and hard times, and difficulty. Because empires and civilizations don’t collapse like that; it takes two or three hundred years, typically – stair-step to go down.

And so the idea that evolution has led to our complexity and our civilization, and therefore you know, it’s all sort of uphill from there, without recognizing that we are in the declining decade, or two or three, of the American Empire, we are in the declining century or two of the kind of rapacious industrialism that we’ve had, and that for most of us – and our children and grandchildren – things are going to be more difficult in the future than we, or even our parents experienced. But we’re not going to get that if we think there’s this arrow of evolution, that complexity can only occur when there’s the energy there.

And we're now in a place where we're running out of the kind of cheap, abundant, easily transportable fossil fuel that's a one-time gift from this planet. And solar energy and wind energy is a lot more diffuse, so we're going to have to live simpler lives, we're going to have to live less wasteful lives, we're going to have to rely on our neighbors again and help our neighbors out, and they help us out.

So we're going to see the emergence of localism and community. And this idea that we get grapes from Chile shipped up to New York, or whatever, this kind of globalization that has been so fossil fuel intensive is going away.

Rick: And, so many things to say as usual, in response to everything you just said. And, either we're going to do that willingly: we're going to kind of wise-up and begin to cooperate and so on, and the things you just said, or we're going to be forced into it.

So if we go through hell and high water – you know, as the U.S. and western civilizations collapse, I wouldn't see that as contradictory to the notion that there's an evolutionary imperative guiding the universe; I would say that mother is cleaning the dirt off us. We need to go through that in the service of our evolution.

RMD: I like that. I mentioned that William Catton's book *Overshoot* – somebody might just be coming in – this is the book that I think is the most important book in print. But there's two other books that I want to highly recommend that are - actually, both of these people that I'm about to recommend have also grounded. They both consider *Overshoot* to be one of the best books they've ever read in their lives.

Rick: That's one of the advantages of living on the road, you have a lot of time to read books.

RMD: Exactly...is Richard Heinberg's latest book called *Afterburn: Society Beyond Fossil Fuels*. It's not just doom and gloom. It's about a positive vision of the future, but it's also in touch with reality. So I highly recommend Richard Heinberg's book *Afterburn*.

And then my favorite author in the world, John Michael Greer. I've read ten of his books in the last two years. His blog posts, like 50.., 60.., 70,000 people every week read his blog posts on the Arch Druid Report, and this is *Collapse Now and Avoid the Rush: The Best of the Arch Druid Report*. So I highly recommend John Michael Greer and Richard Heinberg, in addition to my main mentor, William Catton.

Rick: Now a few minutes ago you spoke of we being lenses, and that we all see things differently because we are lenses. Here's a quote from William Blake that I'm sure you're familiar with: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is - infinite. For man has closed himself up till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern."

I would say, and this comes back to the whole notion of spiritual development and the possibility of there being universal truth, or universal reality that we're all seeing partially as, you know, blind men feeling the elephant. I would say that if we all – theoretically speaking – if we all cleansed our windows of perception a whole lot, to the point where they were clear, then there would be, pretty much, universal agreement about some of the things that we now just have to, sort of, grant a lot of latitude

for... “Well my friend believes this, I believe that, whatever – we’re friends.” We could actually get right down to a scientific, experiential verification, or rebuttal of many things that we now consider metaphysical.

RMD: Yeah, I don’t know about that Rick, because the only way that I can think of that human beings en masse – the whole of us, lots of us, or even just a few of us for that matter – can totally cleanse the lens of our perception, is to totally live without language.

Once we use symbolic language, we’re in the realm of interpretation, and those interpretations fog our view, shade our view, focus our attention. And even the idea of the infinite is a human construct. It’s a category; it’s a way of thinking. And certainly I think the idea of limitlessness, the idea of infinity, the idea of unlimited possibilities served us at one time in human history, and I don’t think it serves us anymore.

We need to honor – that’s why I say God is in the limits – we need to honor the fact that the water and the soil, and the health of the soil, and the ability of our atmosphere to absorb carbon dioxide, and the ability of our oceans to absorb our waste... you know, nature is not unlimited, and nature is not infinite.

Yeah, you can talk about perhaps at the scale of the universe as a whole, I don’t know. But in terms of this planet, let’s just start here, there’s not an unlimited or infinite amount of resources that we can take from the natural world. There’s not an unlimited or infinite ability for this planet to absorb our waste and our refuse, and all that kind of stuff. And so I think that I would rather say, I don’t know if we can cleanse our perceptions and whatever; I do think that we need to at least have as clear-eyed an understanding as possible of ecological reality - that’s why I love William Catton’s book *Overshoot* so much - that we can then say with a humility, “Okay, as an individual, and as a member of different collectives, different groups of people, I’m committed to doing everything I can to be pro-future, to live pro-future, to vote pro-future, to work toward a healthy future as a sacred responsibility.” And that doesn’t necessarily require us to cleanse the lens of perception, because I don’t know that that’s possible given we live in a world co-created by symbolic language, where words create worlds. That is, the world views that we live and move and have our being within, are co-created by the language that we use.

Rick: Well, let me respond to that. Here’s some more from Blake: “To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wildflower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour.” I think what he’s referring to, he’s not referring to the non-fact that natural resources are infinite, or anything like that; what he’s saying is that infinity is intrinsic to creation. It’s the essential stuff; it’s the essential nature of creation. And quantum physicists will tell you that too, that that which appears to be a finite pen on my desk, if you get right down to its ultimate reality, is an infinite something.

RMD: And, the natural world – I mean, take a pen, or take a tree, or a flower – if you have what my wife Connie Barlow and others call “deep time eyes,” if you have eyes informed by what God, Reality – if you don’t like the word God, just Reality – what Reality’s revealed through science about deep time, evolutionary history, then when Connie is in a forest, she isn’t just seeing in the way that an uninitiated person who, let’s say meditates a lot, but doesn’t have any evolutionary understanding of like, “Okay,

this species of tree has been around 275 million years. This species of tree has been here and there and different places.” When you have a deep time understanding, that is, an evolutionary understanding that’s informed by science...Connie actually has a more intimate relationship with forests than I do, in most cases, because she has a depth of knowledge - it’s almost as if she understands the biography.

If you and I just met, we can have a really wonderful relationship. But if we’ve take two or three hours each to share our life story with each other, all of a sudden there’s an intimacy. There’s a way that I’m seeing you in deeper way, I’m experiencing you in a deeper way with some understanding of your history. And the same is true for all life forms.

So when you understand these various species of squirrels, or raccoons, or various trees, that deep time eyes gets us a way to quote that Blake poem again, “...to see heaven in a grain of sand...” and you know, all that kind of stuff, we have that sacred eyes. So deep time eyes and sacred eyes, I think, will definitely serve us in helping us move into a healthy future.

Rick: Yes, and that’s in a way an intellectual understanding – deep time eyes, and big history, and all that stuff – but it gets sort of imbibed into our mentality to such an extent, that I think it kind of begins to color everything we see spontaneously, without our having to think about it, right?

RMD: It can, as long as we also have the humility to not just think that what we’re studying is a machine, like a clock. Where, you know, we take apart the clock and break it down [into] all the component parts, and you can put it back together again, and you’ve got a clock!

That no, nature isn’t that. If I take a squirrel and take it all down to its parts, I can’t put it back together again. There’s this – what I call Divine mystery. There’s this Divine, sacred something, this emergence, that makes the whole squirrel, a functional squirrel, the squirrel prior to death, different than a squirrel that’s died and that essence that had that squirrel alive.

So there’s a humility, there’s a generosity, there’s again - sacred eyes is my short hand for it. But there’s a way that if we had the humility to know that we are part of nature; we’re not the controllers of nature, we’re not the masters of nature. And in fact, if we don’t regain the kind of humility that all indigenous peoples had in the face of this reality that some people call nature, some people call the goddess, some people call God, whatever, but that we are missing something vital.

And in fact, it may be, it may be that the only way that we can truly usher in a just, healthy, and sustainably life-giving future, is to regain that sense of humility. I see it like the prodigal species. You know, humanity – the prodigal species – we’ve squandered our inheritance. We’re waking up to our predicament in the pig pen, as it were, and we’re coming home to Reality, to God, to the Father – whatever metaphor you want to use. But we’re coming back home to reality, and there’s that humility, and sacred eyes that I think is going to be vital in that process.

Rick: Yeah, and I want you to elaborate more on what humility and sacred eyes means, but let me just throw in something here, from the Bhagavad Gita, which is...I forget which chapter...but that “the enlightened person sees all beings in the self, and the self in all beings.”

RMD: Amen.

Rick: And what that means is that you and I are actually the same person. Superficially, there appears to be two of us, but when we get right down to it, we are the same consciousness. You know, it's like the electrical field - it shines through this light bulb, it works through this camera, it works in this iPod, and it's the same field expressing itself through different instruments.

So you and I are different instruments, but different sense organs of the Infinite, we could say, expressing, reflecting... Well, or another analogy, the sun, same sun, shining on a bunch of different things. It reflects this way off a pond, this way off a mirror, this way off a diamond, and yet it's the same light reflecting differently through different reflectors.

RMD: Right, and we're both being breathed by life. I mean, we talk about "I'm breathing," "you're breathing," but in a way, I don't have to think about it. Life is breathing through me. There's one life that breathes through all creatures. There's ultimately not the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the Mississippi River; there's one water system on Planet Earth. And that same water system flows through our veins and comes down our face when we cry.

So that's again, coming to the awareness that we participate in - what I call sacred reality - that we need to live in right relationship to reality. That's what I call my message these days: the gospel of right relationship to reality. That is, the good news that's only possible when we honor what's fundamentally, undeniably, and inescapably real. And whatever else that means and includes nature - my outer nature, my inner nature, my social nature, and my interpretive nature.

And so being in right relationship with nature means honoring that nature, not dishonoring that nature. And we dishonor nature when we think we can continue to use the air, the water, the soil as a garbage can.

Time is real. Now I know some spiritual people say the only thing that's real is the present moment. Horse shit. The 13.8 billion years of creativity made this moment possible, and so the past is real. Yes, the only place that you can experience or think about the past is in the present moment, that's true, but that doesn't discount the reality of the past. And the future - if we act as if the future is not real, we will condemn the future. So being in right relationship, that is, honoring the reality of time - acknowledging that the only place I can be grateful to the past, and the only place that I can be a blessing to the future is in the present moment. Amen. But that doesn't make it real; it's less real.

And so dishonoring time, I would say, is somebody who thinks time isn't real or, more potently in this western culture, is somebody who says, "The past only goes back a few thousand years, and who cares about climate change? I mean, Jesus is coming back again." And so that's dishonoring time.

And then finally, dishonoring mystery. Because again I think time, nature, and mystery - whatever else the word reality holds, it at least means time, nature, and mystery, because those are real whether we believe it or not. In fact, I love this quote from Phillip K. Dick. He says, "Reality is that which when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."

Mystery is real to that degree. Not just the realm that we don't know, but the entire realm that we don't even know that we don't know. So living in an honorable relationship to mystery is to recognize that we don't have all the answers! That there's an intelligence, there's a reality larger than us that we're an expression of. We're not separate from, but we don't have access to the wisdom of the whole, and the intelligence of the whole. So there's that humility.

And to dishonor mystery is to think that we are at the end of knowledge, that we know everything, or we can know everything, or we can control everything, and that kind of hubris.... I love John Michael Greer's definition of hubris: "The overweening pride of the doomed." Love it.

Rick: That's great stuff. When you speak of humility, what that gets right down to for me is misappropriating the authorship of action, and the ownership of who we actually are. I mean, if I think that I am just this person, and that I came into existence at such and such a time, and that I will go out of existence at such and such a time, and that I am actually in total control of my life, or I am trying to be, and so on and so forth, it automatically means that I'm going to insist that things happen a particular way, that I'm going to try to box all sorts of understandings into my little head, rather than honor the mystery, as you say.

But if I recognize that I am this deep, vast intelligence which is eternal, expressing itself through this particular instrument, at this particular time, then I think that automatically enables me, or anyone, to live in a humble way.

RMD: I completely agree. And what this reminds me of is the whole topic that a lot of people think religion is mostly about this – I don't think it is. Religion, if it's doing job, is to help us live in right relationship to the fundamentally real, undeniably real aspects of our reality. That is, the limitations of our ecological context, the challenges of living in community – because there are challenges to living in community.

All religions have promoted personal wholeness and social coherence by [a variety] of ways of doing that. So one of the things a lot of people think religion is mostly about is death, or the after-death, or the afterlife, or what happens when we die, and that sort of thing. And just speaking as a religious naturalist, I am a bow of gratitude to whatever metaphysical or theological ways that people have of thinking about death, that's fine.

But I visit graveyards a lot, Connie and I visit graveyards a lot. And one of the reasons we do it is because: A – it promotes humility. I mean, you don't have to read too many gravestones before you realize, it wasn't very long ago that a lot of women died in childbirth, and a lot of children died under the age of five. And so we're fortunate in that that's not the reality for most of us today.

But it also gives me a perspective that I find hugely valuable, and that is, I'll look at a gravestone and I'll read the name and the dates, and if this person is there with their husband or wife, or whatever, and one of the things I'll say to myself often is, whatever this person may have believed about his soul or spirit or consciousness – whatever transcended death, that may have inspired them to live a great life, no problem, fine – but from the perspective of every life form in the universe, this person is everlastingly

dead. And pretty soon, I'm going to be just as everlastingly dead. That is, this Michael Dowd, in this form, with this consciousness, and these thoughts, and these feelings will - from the perspective of every life form in the universe, I will no longer exist in that way.

And what that does for me is, paradoxically, it's just deeply inspiring. I have one life to leave a legacy! I have one life to make a difference, and I don't want to put off the things that are my legacy work, my mission, my sense of my life purpose - like, "where can I make the most difference for the future and for the planet?" I don't want to put those things off.

I went through, I think you may know, five or six years ago I went through a very serious bout of cancer. I had a tumor the size of my fist in my spleen. And I had ten rounds of chemotherapy, then I had my spleen removed. And there was a period of about a month, a month and a half, where we were looking at the possibility that I could die in the next six months...to a year.

And even when that was the case, I had what religious people call "the peace that passes understanding." Now I did have one afternoon...I was diagnosed on Thursday, on Saturday afternoon I had some serious fear. But after that, from Saturday evening on to this day - that was five years ago - basically the two emotions that I was flooded with: one was gratitude - when I look to the past, I had this tremendous gratitude that I had lived, at that time, 51 years - that I was graced to have lived that long. My kids - my three children are doing really well, so my genetic legacy felt like it was in good hands. My memetic legacy - my ideas...my book was doing well, my ideas were getting out into the world. And so I felt this gratitude, like, oh my God, I've lived already probably longer than most of my ancestors. So I had this gratitude when I looked to the past.

And then when I looked to the future, including a future that didn't include me - like if I die in the next year - I had this trust. And for me that's what faith is. Faith for me, real faith, is trusting that whatever happens on the other side of death is just fine. And so that gratitude for the past and trust for the future, has allowed me for these last five years, to be in this place where, even though I'm cancer-free, and I've had three CAT scans that showed no signs of cancer, and to my knowledge I'm a 100% healthy, I don't take my life for granted anymore.

I choose to cherish every season. And like we were talking about earlier in our conversation, I personify, Connie and I personify the seasons. So at the end of spring for example, not long ago - actually, technically we're not in summer yet, till the 21st of June, but at the beginning of June we personify the Spring.

And we said, both of us we were out watching the sunset - we're in northern Michigan right now - and we watched the sunset and we said, "Thank you spring for being such an amazing season this year. If one or both of us don't experience you again," - and we actually hold in our minds and our hearts the possibility that one or both of us could die before springtime comes again next year - "if one or both of us don't experience you again, we just cherish what a gift you've been." And then we're silent. And often, one or both of us will start crying. We just don't want to take our lives for granted.

So that, as a religious naturalist, as a sacred realist, it seems to me, at least this is my world view, you and your viewers and listeners may be different, but to my mind it seems pretty clear that where we go to when we die, is the same place we came from before we were born. And whether you speak of that as “coming from God and returning to God,” or “coming from mystery and returning to mystery,” or “coming from nothing and returning to nothing,” I think all those are legitimate ways of thinking about it.

But as I sometimes say, not just jokingly, if where I go to when I die isn't the very same place that all the plants and animals and bacteria have gone, I'm gonna be pissed! I don't think we humans get to go to some special place that the rest of nature doesn't get to go to. So, that's just my world view.

Rick: You and Connie and I have a mutual friend in David Sunfellow, down in Sedona.

RMD: Oh David, yes, a beautiful man.

Rick: You've probably seen his documentary on near-death experiences.

RMD: Yeah exactly, this is one of the areas where David and I have a different world-view. It's a really important thing for him, this whole idea that human consciousness is somewhat different from all other forms of consciousness, and that we survive death in some real way.

Rick: Well, I think [he says] cats and dogs do too.

RMD: Okay, that's cool too.

Rick: Or whatever, amoebas – that we're all sort of evolving entities, and that we've all had many lives, we'll all have many lives, and there's a lot of evidence for it. It's not something that you need to believe in, or anybody needs to believe in, but it could work that way. Let's take it as a theory.

RMD: Right, and there's different ways of thinking about that. You can believe as some people do, that there's these individual entities – spiritual, nonmaterial entities – called souls, that go from one to another to another to another. There's others like Carl Jung and others that see this more in terms of the collective unconscious that we tap into.

Rick: Yeah, take a bucket out of it and that becomes a life.

RMD: Right, right, exactly. So I don't happen to hold the belief that past lives or future lives, in a literal sense, is real, but that doesn't mean I can't be a bow of respect and honor to those of my friends who do have that belief.

Rick: Yeah. Regarding beliefs, personally, I regard all beliefs as theories that are open to investigation, and there are means and tools for investigating them. But scientists get all hot and bothered if some other scientist has a theory that they don't happen to ascribe to; they think, well let's test it, you know? Let's all test it and see how it works out, and maybe I'll change my mind and maybe I won't. And obviously, a lot of scientists aren't quite as flexible and objective as that. As someone said, science progresses by a series of funerals - ideally, at least.

RMD: Well, religion doesn't even do that! Because of our idolatry of the written word, and idolatry of the other worldly, and idolatry of beliefs – what I call the triple idolatries. Idolatry of the written word is where you think God's best guidance, that is, our best map of reality is frozen in time. Idolatry of the other worldly is where you think where ultimate value, ultimate holiness or reality exists is only outside time and nature. And idolatry of belief is when you think [that] any one belief system is the only one right way to right relationship to reality.

Those triple idolatries make it such that religion doesn't even proceed by funerals, whereas at least science does!

Rick: At least science does, yeah. But still, what do you think about the idea that anything anybody cares to believe in, or not, doesn't need to be taken rigidly, but could be regarded as a potential theory? So, do angels exist, does reincarnation exist, you know? And throughout history, there have been people who have had all sorts of experiences which they spoke about and talked about these things.

Well, there's this show on TV called *The Ghost in My Child*, about little kids who clearly remember a past life and come up with all kinds of details that they couldn't possibly have known otherwise. So, if it's possible for some people to have these experiences, maybe it means that we have the innate capacity to have them and any and all of us could develop that capacity, and thereby use our own mind and nervous system as a scientific instrument, to systematically investigate whether this, that, or the other thing were in fact true.

RMD: And my basic response to that is: so what? In other words, this is one of the metaphysical things that can be distracting, because what we most need to focus on now is, how we get our energy, how we grow our food, how we live our lives, how do we shift this demonic economic system that is designed to reward a few at the expense of the many, and designed to make almost all of us harm the future.

Rick: So for you it's like angels dancing on the head of a pin, or something?

RMD: Yeah exactly, it's like, who the fuck cares? Excuse my language.

Rick: It's alright.

RMD: If your belief systems, if your metaphysics inspires you to be of greater service to the future, and to live in a more humble, less carbon-intensive way, then I am a deep bow of gratitude. If your belief system thinks that you can continue to living high on a hog, in a carbon-intensive way, and who cares what things are going to be like a hundred years from now, then I'm going to say, your beliefs are not serving you, and your beliefs are likely to allow your children and grandchildren to condemn them.

So I tend to focus a lot less, at this time, on these sorts of metaphysical questions. And David – you mentioned David Sunfellow – I love David. Another David [that] I hugely value and love and respect is one of the world's top scientists in the whole field of biology, and evolutionary biology, and that's David Sloan-Wilson.

Edward O. Wilson and David Sloan-Wilson are two of the leading evolutionary theorists, and they actually agree on a whole lot more than either one of them agrees with Richard Dawkins, who is another leading evolutionary theorist. But David Sloan-Wilson has this really important distinction between practical truth and factual truth, or practical realism and factual realism. And it's really simple: practical truth is when it's a belief or way of thinking that if you act as if it's true, your life is served, your community is served. In other words, it promotes personal wholeness and social coherence. It's practical truth.

It's a way of thinking that if I act as if this is real, or act as if this is true, the fruit of my life, individually and socially, is good fruit. It's what religions traditionally have specialized in – practical truth. Factual truth is what science specializes in, but factual truth can kill us if it is not interpreted in ways that also promote personal wholeness and social coherence. And, from an evolutionary standpoint, David Sloan-Wilson makes the point that practical truth will outcompete factual truth everyday, if they're up against each other.

So that's why one of the tasks that are important, that we attend to now, is how to take the factual truth that we're gaining through evidential revelation – that is, what God, Reality is revealing through evidence – how do we take that factual truth and make sure that we interpret it in ways that also serve us individually, collectively, and are pro-future. Again, how does it serve the future? So I think that distinction between practical and factual truth is a very, very useful one.

Rick: Yeah, it is, and I think there's some really exciting and powerful implications to what you're saying here. We have a tradition of wanting to know things - as human beings - and wanting to accomplish things. Like, we wanted to get to the moon right? And a lot of people argued against doing that and spending the money – “What practical value does that have, it's just a bunch of rocks?”

But it turned out that the effort to get to the moon not only gave us Tang, but it brought about all sorts of innovations and technological developments...

RMD: It helped us look back and look at the Earth as a living, one, creative, living reality that we either need to learn to live in right relation to or we're screwed.

Rick: Yeah, and now we've built this huge particle accelerator in Geneva, and we've discovered the Higgs-Boson, and people are saying, “So what? What's the Higgs-Boson going to do for us?” But somehow the effort to know ends up, more often than not, having all sorts of unforeseen benefits and consequences, and also, of course, gives us the capability of destroying ourselves.

Where I'm going with this is that I sort of feel like it doesn't have to be an either or situation. I mean, I know there are spiritual people who just marinate in their experiences and could give a damn what happens to the environment, and it's very narcissistic and self-indulgent and waste-of-time. But I also, at the same time and in the same breath, I feel like somehow the unfolding of deep mystical experience, and the commonality of that that I see blossoming all over the world as I interview people week after week - people with sometimes no prior interest to such things are just waking up to this profound depth

of experience – has important implications for what you’re so passionate about in terms of changing societal systems, and changing the way we treat the ecology and all.

I think there’s a connection there that you might be glossing over, you might feel like “to heck with that metaphysical...”

RMD: Well no, no, no. I don’t discount that, I don’t undervalue it; I think that we are shaped by our experiences. Whatever we call spirituality – for me, spirituality are the practices and exercises, the heartset and the mindset that helps me live in right relationship to reality. And there are profound experiences that are possible for the human animal, that help us feel our deep connectedness, our relatedness, our at-homeness, that also inspire us to live with greater integrity, greater generosity, greater thoughtfulness, greater care, and that I am in any way underplaying that or devaluing that.

I’m just suggesting that I do know some people that are so caught up in the pursuit of those states of consciousness, that for them they downplay the fact that fifty years from now, the generations alive, the people living – alive – fifty years from now, and my granddaughter is four years old – almost five years old. So that puts her one year younger than I am now –fifty years from now.

Now what my granddaughter is going to care about, and what her generation is going to care about isn’t how much I meditated, not what my beliefs were, they’re not going to care whether we... all the things that we think are important, the thing that’s going to most matter to them is: do they still have soil to grow food? Do they have a climate that is not so punishingly cruel that it’s as though they were condemned. That’s what I mean, is that if our spiritual practices don’t serve us to be a blessing to the future, then what the hell are they about? It’s just spiritual masturbation.

Rick: I totally agree with you, and that’s why I was so excited about having this interview with you, because you put your money where your mouth is. And I was at that Science & Nonduality conference a few years ago and somebody, David Lloyd – a Buddhist teacher, you may be familiar with – got up on the mike and was asking a teacher who was up on the podium: what about ecology, and what about the Earth, and all that stuff?

And this guy, in a very sort of detached way answered, “Well, you know, it’s just a speck of dust. It doesn’t matter in the big scheme of things.” And David was like, come on! He kept kind of pushing the guy.

I think there has to be a complete, holistic package. So let’s talk about the situation with the environment. We have a government, which is owned by corporations, which is making stupid decisions, and half of which denies that there’s even a problem, and we want to change that. Let me just finish – so se go that on the one hand.

On the other hand, I see this upsurge of spiritual awakening taking place all over the world, and I connect the two. I think that nature is giving us a lifeline. It’s responding to the dire situation that we’ve gotten ourselves into with a solution which maybe most of us don’t see coming, but which is ultimately

fundamental, and will ripple up, in terms of changing the mindsets of people in the world, such that we can actually begin to see change in policy matters, and corporate behavior, and stuff like that.

So in other words, what I'm saying in a nutshell is that, spiritual awakening is the ultimate solution to greed and stupid behavior that's wrecking the world.

RMD: Yeah, I agree with part of that, and I'm not sure I agree with all of it. Because again, when we look at; when we take a careful look at the 24 complex civilizations that have existed before ours, all of which have declined and fallen, one of the things that we see is [that] at the height, and within the first several decades of the decline of that civilization, many people...

There are these religious movements that are all seeing a leap in consciousness, a transformation, some large scale, where everybody's gonna get it! And so this is where I come to ecology is the new theology. And that's why William R. Catton's book *Overshoot* is, in my opinion, the most important book in print, because what he talks about are some of the fundamental ecological realities.

And when you understand human history from an ecological standpoint, you realize that not only have these 24 civilizations, but other less complex societies have often...where they met their downfall was when they didn't honor the ecological limits, living in a way that was within the carrying capacity – to use ecological language – that every bioregion, every continent, every land base has a carrying capacity. That is, it can support so many of this kind of animal living in this kind of way.

Now Earth can support so many human beings, that is homo-sapiens, but now we're not even dealing just with homo-sapiens, we're dealing with what Catton calls homo-colossus. That is, each one of us is now living – that is, we are using the resources and exuding waste like 20 human beings say, 500 years ago – that's homo-colossus.

So we have overshoot – this is a fact - the carrying capacity of the planet severely. And the only reason that we haven't seen a die off, which is common to all species that are in overshoot, is that we are taking nonrenewable resources from this deep, old sequestered carbon and putting it out, and sustaining us that way. But A – that's not infinite, we can't do that infinitely. And, the more we do that we're actually lessening the carrying capacity.

So over the course of the next 100, 150 years, when there's a decline in population, as there absolutely has to be, we will see, hopefully, whatever emerges on the other side, the forms of religiosity won't be other worldly, because those will be condemned.

People living 50 years now will be condemning the religions that didn't stop the kind of chaos that we're dealing with. That's why we need to have – again, as we've talked about several times in this conversation - this humility and ecological sensitivity, where we come back into a mutually enhancing relationship with the air, the water, the soil, the life of our region, and we honor God's limits. That is, we honor nature's limits.

Ultimately I'm hopeful. When you step back and look at things from a big history perspective, I think that we'll be seeing this little blip of time where we thought that we could control nature, we thought

that we could dominate nature, we thought that we didn't have to worry about our consequences, and we're going to experience the catastrophic results of that in the next 10 to 15 hundred years. But there will be a restabilizing of climate, there will be a restabilizing, probably at a very different level than now.

And for the next – let's say humans have been around for 200 thousand years; homo-sapiens – that is using symbolic language, the next 200 thousand years, a thousand years from now, or even 2 thousand or 5 thousand, whatever, it's going to be humans once again, as we did for 99% of our history, up until just 10 thousand years ago – we did live in a mutually enhancing relationship, or we suffered the consequences.

We live beyond the carrying capacity of our bioregion, and there was a die out. So ultimately I'm hopeful in a longer term sense, but I think we've got some purgatory, we've got some burning off, we've got some challenges where we've been out of right relationship to reality. It's a terribly exciting and terrifying time to be alive, but I personally don't hold out hope that there's going to be some massive consciousness shift that's then going to immediately translate to systemic institutional shift, that's going to spare us from dealing with the consequences of our actions for the last several hundred years.

There are going to be consequences, we're going to have to deal with them, but hopefully people living a hundred years, two hundred years, three hundred years, five hundred years from now will be grateful for the fact that humanity was backing into this intimate, personal relationship with God, with the Goddess, with Reality, with Nature.

Rick: I actually agree with you. I do think there's a massive consciousness shift, but I also think that that might actually celebrate the collapse of all kinds of institutions and businesses, and corporations and what not, that have no place in sustainable world. Or perhaps it will buffer the change - you know, make it a little bit more smooth.

[That] there's a big consciousness shift is kind of undeniable when you begin to see how it's proliferating.

RMD: Well certainly in terms of, I mean, Ken Wilbur and others speak about that we go from self-centeredness to group-centeredness, to nation-centeredness, to planetary and global. There's this consciousness that's expanding our sense of in-group. I mean we had cooperate today with people our grandparents feared and hated.

So there's this sense of greater cooperation, greater compassion, greater empathy. Whether that is able to be sustained on the other side when fossil fuels are but a distant memory, and we don't have that kind of global cooperation and global transport, I don't know. But I do agree that there has been in this last several hundred years an expansion – and longer than that – an expansion of consciousness, an expansion of how we interpret reality, and experience reality, that hopefully will not be lost.

Part of how I see my own life purpose, my own mission, is to ensure that whatever forms of religiosity emerge on the other side of the coming challenges, that it be deeply grounded in our best evidential understanding of reality. So evidence is modern day scripture, evidence as Divine guidance, evidence as

God's word - not just ancient texts. But also a deeply ecological relationship to God, or to theology, that's why I speak of 'ecology is theology.'

Rick: Well when I say consciousness shift, the title of this show kind of indicates what I mean. *Buddha at the Gas Pump*, which is that there are Buddhas awakening everywhere, in ordinary circumstances; it's no longer a rare, unattainable thing. And such people have an impact.

I totally agree, I mean I don't want to give you the impression that I don't, that the things that are foremost on your plate are critical, and that if spirituality has any value whatsoever, it has to contribute to the solution of those types of problems.

So let's shift it a little bit right now and talk about people like Bill McKibben are saying we can't go over 350 parts per million and now we're already past 4[00], and people are saying we can't go over 2 degrees centigrade, and it looks like we're going to shoot right past that, and people like yourself are running around saying, "We've got to change, we've got to change." When you like your head on the pillow at night, do you think, "Well, are we going to change, or am I just shouting against the wind here, and there seems to be this huge momentum that little guys like me aren't making a dent in?"

RMD: I don't feel that way at all. I feel like I'm making the biggest difference I'm capable of making at this time in history, given my unique gifts and limitations.

Rick: But is it enough? Will it be enough? You and people like you.

RMD: Will it be enough to save industrial, rapacious civilization? No.

Rick: No, we don't want to do that.

RMD: Will it be enough to prevent us from experiencing the consequences or where we've been radically out of right relationship to nature for the last several hundred years? No. But will it be enough to help ensure that there will be many of us, millions of us, that do move into the future consciously, with big hearts and big sense of commitment, so that there are the seeds – the seeds are planted so that a healthy human-Earth relationship emerges over the course of the next 50-, 100-, 150-, 200 years? Yes.

I do think I can make that difference, I do think we are. And the work you're doing, the work that so many of these colleagues - these 55 people that I interviewed as part of *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*. In fact, anybody that's watching or listening to this, just put in Google '*The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*', you'll get there.

I interviewed 55 of the world's amazing leaders, in terms of sustainability, climate change, peak oil, and a sprinkling of spiritual leaders that can help us hold this scary stuff in ways that don't just freak us out, but that inspire us to be in action. And these conversations – about a dozen of them – brought me to tears.

I was so moved by these Skype conversations with these amazing people. You can watch any of them for free, up online, and I think you can get the transcripts for free, but if you want to download them to

your computer or your iPod so you can listen on your own time, I think it's just 25 bucks for the entire – all 55 interviews, so it's really quite affordable.

Rick: So you would say then that despite the fact that petro-chemical industry, or the petroleum industry is massively wealthy and massively powerful, and that so many laws and things seem so deeply entrenched, so many ways of doing things, that it's a David and Goliath situation maybe, where their power and invincibility are a lot flimsier than they may appear and they're going to fall.

RMD: Well, they will fall but some of them will transform. Some of them it won't be so much a matter of falling so much as in the coming, literally years and decades...the selection pressure.

Okay, I'm an evolutionary, I'm an evolutionary theologian, I'm an evolutionary evangelist, and so for me it's viewing through deep time and through our best evolutionary understanding. And the environmental conditions for the last 100 years benefited the way we've been doing things. We've been living in a wasteful way, we had [an] abundance of energy, more energy than we knew what to do with, but those conditions have now shifted.

So now we're living in a different environment and that environment is now calling forth. So the things that will survive and thrive in the next 50 years are not the same things that survived and thrived in the last 50 years, and then 50 years after that.

And so the environment is radically changing, and we will see our economics change. Just last week I was with a whole group of some of the top ecological economists in the world down in Southern California, and other people too – there was this big conference that I was just at. There is some radical rethinking of how we do economics, how we do politics, how we do law, how we do medicine.

I mean law, the idea that all rights and privileges go to humans and to human corporations, and that humans and human corporations can do anything they want to nature, that's insane. We currently have a democracy; a democracy is a conspiracy against the natural world. We have to have "biocracy", that is, we have to allow the voices of the natural world and the natural systems to be reflected in our jurisprudence, in our laws and stuff like that.

So we're going to be seeing, over the course of the coming decades, radical shifts. Some of it will be collapse, some of it will be endings, but some of it will be transformations and evolutions so that whatever form of law exists 50 years from now, whatever form of medicine exists 50 years from now – I mean, the first concern of medicine needs to be the health of the bioregion, the health of the Earth and the land and the water and the soil, because without that, you can't have healthy humans in a sick and dying world.

So all of our institutions will be shifting, and it will be evolutionary drivers that will drive that. And I expect in the coming decades – I agree with John Michael Greer that there's two major mythologies that most people are stuck in, that keep them disempowered, that keep them from being in action: one, is the myth of perpetual progress. We don't need to be in action because things are just going to keep

getting better and better. The other is the myth of the apocalypse – we don't need to get engaged, we don't need to be involved, because the whole thing is going to hell in a hand basket anyway.

The truth of the matter is we're in an evolutionary process, and there will be elements of blessing and good and wonderful, and then there'll be difficult, challenging things. So I expect in the next decades, 20% of the worst of humanity to show up, and I expect 80% of the best of humanity to show up. And again, we see this often throughout when we understand the rise and fall of civilizations – that they all rise differently and they all fall the same. And we're now in this contracting process.

That's why I love *Collapse Now and Avoid the Rush* by John Michael Greer, and Richard Heinberg's *Afterburn: Society After Fossil Fuels*. These are people that help us hold the scary stuff in ways that keep us in action, but they avoid these two mythologies.

So this is a quote from Jim Dodge, who's a bioregionalist leading into sustainability, and he says, "All the people I talk to say that we have a fighting chance to stop environmental destruction in 50 or 60 years, and to turn the culture around in 800 to 1,000 years." And he says, "Fighting chance translates as long odds, but good company. So let's just start with the best style and spirit that we can muster, knowing that there's only a functional difference between the root and the flower. They're both a part of the same abiding faith. So dig in!"

Rick: It's great that you have these quotes memorized like that. I guess you've said them so many times.

RMD: That particular one I actually haven't said in, gosh, probably eight years.

Rick: Not bad. So when you say that you expect 20% of the worst of humanity to show up and 80% of the best of humanity to show up, what does that mean in terms of the daily news? Are you talking about things like Isis and terrorist stuff is going to be bubbling up and be getting more strident, but at the same time all kinds of great technological innovations and democratic things, and women's rights and all that stuff are going to flourish?

RMD: A little bit of both. I think we're going to be seeing – again, I think that when you step into the mindset of fundamental Isis, for example, you realize that what most people want is just a stable life. They want to be able to grow their food and do their things, and the challenges of living in a world of overshoot – we have overshoot the carrying capacity. So there's stressors, there's antagonism; there's all kinds of stressors that we're feeling.

And it's not a surprise to me that we see fundamentalist elements of Islam that are violently opposed to the influence that they see that western culture is having on their youth. And so I'm not condoning or justifying or saying that that's good, but I am saying that it's not a surprise that we see these kinds of conflicts.

And so what I'm meaning a little bit more is, as things in a contracting economy, in a contracting civilization, in a contracting empire – that is, where 5% of the species enjoys 25% of the world's resources and energy and products, and stuff like that – that's no longer sustainable – so as all that's

contracting, I think we're going to see people being generous, and involved, and committed, and engaged, and working with each other, and this is what I mean by the 80% of the best of humanity. And we're also going to see self-centeredness, greed, arrogance – that's also going to be there, but I don't see that in the majority. I see that as significantly in the minority, because of some of the breakthroughs in consciousness, some of the breakthroughs in awareness, some of the breakthroughs in terms of our heart and mind, and how we think and feel, that has occurred over the last centuries.

I think that that's creating a platform where it's not going to be all good, it's not going to be all bad. Again, part of this comes out of just understanding the way past civilizations have risen and fallen, but I think we're going to see that the difference between those and now is we also have a climate that is going to be changing things. I mean, [the] last 5,000 years, which is where all those 24 civilizations arose and fall, didn't have to deal with the kind of extreme climate that we're going to have to deal with in the next 50 to 100 years.

Rick: Essentially you know, because when there's a big snow storm or hurricane or something, a certain faction gets out and start looting the stores, but a large faction, and this speaks to the point you just made, becomes very neighborly and compassionate, and does stuff to help people that they otherwise would never even speak with.

RMD: Exactly, and that's what I mean by the 20/80%. And you know, it maybe 10%/90%, or it may be 40%/60%, who knows? But I think far more, we're going to see the better side of humanity, the better side of our angels emerge, and we will see less of that, but we'll also see some real challenges and greed, and the dark side of humanity.

Rick: Yeah, sometimes when something's existence is threatened, it really starts to fight much more than ever before. It's like there's a lot of things in our world – a lot of technologies, corporations, and what not which, as I said earlier, I don't really belong in the kind of sustainable, wholesome world that you're talking about.

Well, you said it actually, BP could really get into solar power, and actually that's happening. There are some companies that are fighting the installation of solar panels and they see it as a threat to their business model, and there are others who think – hey, this is the future; let's get on board with this.

RMD: Yeah, absolutely, and this again is where humility is useful, is that, in a world that is evolving through a process of emergence, it can't be predicted ahead of time. We cannot know ahead of time, and we will always be surprised by what emerges, especially in a global civilization that is this complex.

So anybody who thinks they can say with confidence that this, that, or the other thing is going to be the case 10 years from now, or 20 years from now, or 30 years from now, they don't get emergence. But there are certain *patterns* though that we can glean. And that's why I so appreciate the historic wisdom, and the ecological wisdom of somebody like a William Catton, or John Michael Greer, or Richard Heinberg, is they really ground everything they say about the future in that historical understanding.

I see that there will be things that surprise the hell out of us. Not just technologically, but socially and every other way. But again, it's not like I'm pro-technology or anti-technology. It's not like I'm pro-progress or anti-progress. There are forms of progress that are pro-future, that is, it's a progress where there will be a healthy future - healthy soil, healthy land, healthy forest. And there are ways of thinking about progress that is only human progress but nature's getting worse. That's not progress in any definite sense.

There are ways of thinking about technology – there are technologies that will be pro-future - technologies that will enrich the future, that will help us live in closer intimate relationship with nature - so those are pro-future technologies. And then there are anti-future technologies – technologies that diminish or destroy or damage the future.

So as with anything...I mean, my great mentor, I mentioned William R. Catton, but he's just recent. My other great mentor, Thomas Berry, and I studied Thomas Berry's work for years. Every time we were near anywhere he lived, until he died, we would go visit him. And he called himself a geologian, not a theologian but a geologian, and he was, sort of, the next incarnation, if you will, of Teilhard de Chardin. He took the universe story – the story of everyone and everything – now called “big history” - physical evolution, biological evolution, and cultural evolution, as our first and only globally produced, evidence based creation story as our foundation.

And he said something not long before he died, he said that our current predicament, and our way into the future can be summarized in three short sentences. The first sentence is that, in the 20th Century and early 21st Century the glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth. Meaning [that] things have gotten better and better for a lot of humans, but at the expense of what we depend on, what we rely on – that is, nature. So the glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth.

Rick: And at the expense of a lot of humans too.

RMD: Exactly. The second sentence is that the desolation of the Earth is becoming the great shame of the human. Therefore – this is the third sentence, points our way to the future – therefore, given that, all programs, policies, activities and institutions must henceforth be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.

So that basically, everything we do from now on, everything that we do and everything we create, has to be judged, first and foremost, by whether it's pro-future or anti-future, whether it leads to a more intimate relationship with the natural world upon which we depend, or a more antagonistic or controlled relationship to that. And I think he just nailed it with that, that's why I say from now on our theologies, our philosophies, our metaphysics, our beliefs, our laws, our politics, our economics, everything that we do as humans must be judged, from now on, by whether it is pro-future, whether it leads to a healthy future 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 generations down the road, or whether it's anti-future, whether it is harming or likely to harm future generations, 2,3, 4, 5, 6 generations down the road.

Rick: Sounds great but it sound idealistic. I mean, you say, must be judged, but it isn't being judged. How do we get to the point where it is being judged?

RMD: This is where I think religion has been asleep at the wheel. Religion has been failing in its most fundamental task, which is helping us live in right relationship to primary reality. And part of that is because, at least the religions in the west, have had this other worldly orientation. That's why I call these triple idolatries: idolatry of the written word, idolatry of the other worldly, and idolatry of beliefs, have caused religion to religions to be ignoring God's evidential revelation.

Let me speak in religious language. We've been blind and deaf to what God's been revealing for 500 years, through evidence. As Thomas Berry says, we've been spiritually autistic. We don't listen to the rivers, we don't listen to the wind, we don't listen to the climate, and what are those realities telling us about how we need to live our lives?

We thought God spoke to us in the distant past, in these old books! And we thought where God resided was not in the forest, in the soil, in the land; we thought God resided only outside nature. So we thought we could treat nature however the hell we wanted, because our true home is somewhere else when we died anyway.

So we've been spiritually autistic, and so we've not developed an economy that is pro-future. In fact, almost everything about our economy and our ways of doing law, are anti-future. That's why the biggest task in the next coming decades is how do shift those, how do we transform those, how do we evolve those in ways that help us become more intimate with nature? And that's where humility, and that's where ecological wisdom of the kind that William Catton talks about in his book *Overshoot*, and Richard Heinberg in *Afterburn*, are absolutely essential.

We have to humble ourselves and learn from God's word as revealed through evidence, that our understanding of theology includes ecology, and our understanding of God isn't just some supernatural being outside time and nature, but is a sacred, proper name, a personification of reality – what's real whether we believe it or not – and we're part of that, we're an expression of that.

Rick: So what's going to get us to do that? Tell us.

RMD: Chaos. The shit's going to hit the fan and that's what's going to catalyze us. People, again, when you understand the history of all complex civilizations, one of the things you realize is that when things are going well, or when people can convince themselves that things are going well, there's no motivation for any major change; it's a status quo.

It's only when the poop hits the fan, when things become difficult, when things become challenging, that some of that denial begins to break down. And the more challenging things get, finally, there's finally a willingness to make the kinds of changes that everybody kinda knew you had to make anyway, but there was too much vested interest among powerful entities.

John Michael Greer, for example, just in his last five blog posts in *The Arch Druid Report*, has a series on the five major stages in collapse, going from the era of pretense to the era of impact...this sort of thing. I don't remember all five of them off the top of my head, but his latest series is related to that. And so I think that we can trust that there are challenging things coming down the pike, and that while they may

be challenging, while there may be suffering – necessarily, there will be difficulty - it will also be the absolutely essential thing.

I sometimes say, we cannot avoid the great reckoning. The great reckoning is where humanity has been out of right relationship to reality – whether you use Divine or secular language for that - we've been out of right relationship to reality and we're now about to experience really difficult, challenging consequences.

But it's also the great homecoming; the prodigal specie coming home to reality, to God. And so there's good news and bad news, and I tend to focus on the good news, because I think the bad news is actually going to catalyze and force us to make the changes that we had to make anyway. And I think the whole body of life is rooting for us. I see this is again, myth, but I see the entire body of life rooting for us to make this change.

Rick: Beautiful. That's so well put. And in the way you just put it, the bad news is actually part of the good news, it's just the dark side of the good news, in a way. So that, I think, gives hope to people who feel like the government is so screwed up, and we're never going to get them to change, and they can't even agree on anything, and nothing's getting done, and we're subsidizing the oil industry...

RMD: But all that's real! And that's why I think we need a popular movement. I think I'm one of those people that think that we will see an activist community - you can call it revolutionary, but mostly nonviolent, I expect – revolutionary movement that will make the 1960's look puny in comparison.

But again, it's not a matter of making the business community wrong, because I think there's a hell of a lot of businesses and business leaders who get this. That's why Tom Friedman says, "If you only read one book on climate change, make it Paul Gilding's book, *The Great Disruption*."

Paul Gilding, his book *The Great Disruption*, the subtitle is: *Why the Climate Crisis Will Bring on the End of Shopping and the Birth of a New World*. And he sees the business community being at the forefront of the transformations, and we're this close. As soon as the dam of denial breaks, which could happen this year, next year, next year, but it's not going to be much further than three years out, at most.

Once that dam of denial breaks, the floodwaters are unstoppable. And again, I think this emergence that will see – 20% of stupid, inane stuff, but we're going to see 80% of stuff that's just going to blow our minds.

Rick: And big changes can also happen quite unexpectedly and abruptly. I mean, look at the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the collapse of the Soviet Union, no one really saw those things coming. And boom, overnight, they came.

RMD: And it doesn't always usher in everything good; there are challenges also that got ushered in, but I do think that this is an exciting time to be alive, as long as we're awake, as long as we don't just stay in denial, but we stay awake.

This is why Joanna Macy, another one of my great mentors, Joanna Macy says, “If we hold the pain of the world in our hearts and express it to others, we then experience our profound interconnectedness with life. And yes our hearts break, but they break open with compassion, and that compassion can unite us.

So even though I don't have a copy of it to show, I also highly recommend Joanna Macy's book, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*. She's a Buddhist, as you know, and *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* really allows us to stay present to the challenges, present to the chaos, present to the difficulties, but from a place of finding out where our joy and the world's needs could intersect so that we can be a blessing. But in the same process of us being a blessing to others, we are also blessed in that process.

Rick: I just need to retire so I can start reading all these books you recommend. I have a new book every week because I have a new guest every week. And there's so many of them that my eyes are bigger than my stomach. There's just so many wonderful things to consume in this way.

Okay, I have two pages of notes here, of questions I might ask you in an interview, that you sent to me, actually, and I think we've probably covered most of them.

RMD: I think we've covered most of them.

Rick: But is there anything we haven't covered, you know, without even looking at your notes? Is there anything, scanning back over the course of this conversation, things that are dear to your heart, that are important, that you'd like people to hear, that we didn't touch upon?

RMD: Well, just that I would encourage everybody to do this exercise. I just eluded to it but, take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle, so you've got two columns. And on the one side, list all the activities, the projects, the things that you're good at, the things you love to do, the things that light you up, that give you joy, that give you a sense of energy and fulfillment and happiness, the things that you're good – or that other people tell you that you're good at, or whatever, just list all that, and on the top of that list you put 'My Great Joy.'

And then on the other side of the paper list all the things that you're aware of in your community, or in your world, where you feel the world's needs. Not just where you intellectually know about it, but where you feel it. Where do you feel upset, frustrated, fearful, but especially, where do you feel compassion? Where does your heart just break over something that's happening in your community or in the world? And you list all that.

So you get two lists: 'My Great Joy' and 'The World's Great Needs', or 'My Community's Great Needs'. And then you just pay attention to your heart. You don't even have to call it prayer or meditation if you don't want to; just pay attention to this part of your body. And what you're trying to do is play mix-and-match. Like, where are the intersections between what lights you up, what gives you joy, what gives you energy, and what the world's needs are, or your community's needs, or the future's needs, as you feel them.

And those places of intersection, where your joy and the world's needs, or your joy and the future's needs intersect, that's your calling, that's your mission, that's your vocation at this time in your life. Whether you can make money at it or not is irrelevant; it's finding those places where you can be a blessing in a way that blesses you.

And in addition to that I would say, just you know, it's kind of like John Michael Greer – collapse now and avoid the rush. Like, use less energy, drive less, fly less, eat lower on the food chain, begin to live your or life, or continue – like take it to the next steps – where you can feel good about how you're living, and frankly...

Rick: Are you a vegetarian?

RMD: I was a vegetarian for four years. I now eat some meat, but I always try to get it organic and not support factory farms, and that sort of thing.

Rick: Sure, just because I'm told by some people that the meat industry is worse for the environment even the petroleum industry.

RMD: The agricultural industry as a whole is. But yes, the meat industry in terms of the amount of water that's used, absolutely. So you know, eat a more plant-based diet. Whether you become a strict vegetarian or vegan is another thing, but at least reduce that and try not to support factory farms.

Rick: Yeah, sorry to interrupt.

RMD: But get to know people on farms. I mean, when the Great Depression happened, there were still a lot of people that could move back to the factory farm. That's not the case now. And so do the work of preparation so that when the difficult times happen, if we go through another economic shockwave like 2008 or worse, which is very possible, have a sense of security [about] how you will eat and live, such that if you don't have that much income, or have no income, get to know your neighbors. Get to know people on farms, in other words, build trusted community with others who share your values, such that when difficult times come, you're not freaking out; you've prepared for that so that you can be a blessing to others, so you can be a blessing to those who are freaking out, who don't know what to do.

So yeah, that would be the last thing I would say is, know that the tough times coming down the pike are not necessarily bad. From God's perspective, from life's perspective, and from the body of life's perspective they may be really, really good. And just find those places where you can be a participant in what life is doing, in a pro-future way.

That's going to nourish your soul, no matter what religion or metaphysics or philosophy.

Rick: Fantastic. Well I really appreciate what you're doing; I appreciate your enthusiasm and your energy.

RMD: Thanks Rick, I appreciate what you're doing. You know, these conversations could be inspiring to a lot of people, so just a deep bow of gratitude to your work.

Rick: Well thank you, we'll be in touch. I'd love to meet you in person someday and I don't know, we'll see what happens. I've subscribed to all three of your podcasts, I've downloaded all the episodes, so I'm going to start listening to those, and gonna read all these books you recommended.

RMD: Again, the most important one of all is this one: William Catton, *Overshoot*.

Rick: Alright, that'll be first. I really appreciate having had you on the show. I think listeners are going to appreciate it. It's a little different than some of the conversations I've had, but that's good. I think people get tired of hearing the same old thing.

Well first of all, before I run with you some general points, in terms of how people can connect with you. I'll obviously be linking to your website, but is there anything else you want to say in terms of people – what you want them to read, what you want them to do?

RMD: So basically, if people want to communicate with me, the best way is probably via email - Michael@thankgodforevolution.com. Michael@thankgodforevolution.com. And our main websites are thegreatstory.org - thegreatstory.org, and michaeldowd.org. So either one of those.

Rick: Good, and I will be linking to those from your webpage on BATGAP.com, and I'll link to your book on amazon.com and all that. And you've got a new book in the works.

RMD: Yep, got a new book in the works, but it'll be another 6-, 8-, 10 months before it's out.

Rick: Let me know when it comes out so I can add a link to it.

So let me make some general concluding remarks. I've been speaking with Reverend Michael Dowd, and you know a lot about him by now, so I won't reiterate what he's about. This show is about spiritually awakening people, and I believe, as Michael has beautifully explained, we live in a spiritually awakening culture, and that doesn't just mean abstract metaphysical awakening; it means all sorts of ramifications in terms of changes we're going to see in the world.

If you found this conversation interesting and would like to check out other ones, I do a new one every week and I've done nearly 300, so go to BATGAP.com, B-A-T-G-A-P, check out the 'Past Interviews' menu. The 'Future Interviews' menu includes all the ones that we have scheduled so far.

There are several other things you can do. You can sign up to be notified by email each time a new one is posted. You'll see a link for that. There's a podcast that you can sign up for. We're having some technical difficulties with it, but some people are signing up successfully and getting it every week. So we're still working on making it work properly for everyone.

There's the 'Donate' button that I mentioned in the beginning, critical for our being able to do this. That just about covers it. So thanks for listening or watching and we will see you next week.