

TRANSCRIPT

An Undeceptions podcast.

John Dickson:

Okay, so just for the levels, tell me what you had for breakfast, Rahil.

Rahil Patel:

For the levels. Today, I had my usual grapefruit, apple, kefir, smoothie with flax seeds, ginger and cinnamon. That's as healthy as it gets.

John Dickson:

Excellent.

John Dickson:

Today's episode isn't an exploration of a forgotten piece of history, a tricky topic, or an ethical dilemma. It's a story, plain and simple, a remarkable one. One that I came across on a recent teaching trip to Oxford, just before the Corona outbreak. I just had to share this with you. It's a little longer than normal, but I get the feeling that a story about the search for personal peace is just what our anxious world needs right now.

John Dickson:

And if you want to say something a different way, just say, "I'll say that again," and then say it.

Rahil Patel:

[inaudible 00:00:58].

John Dickson:

If you want to restate something.

Rahil Patel:

Okay, yes.

John Dickson:

Yes. And then we will, in the edit, we just take the good version.

Rahil Patel:

The good version, okay.

John Dickson:

So I'm just saying...

John Dickson:

Well, that was the intention. A lot of work goes into these episodes. And so there's usually not room for everything I'd like to include. But this story is kind of special and the Undeceptions team unanimously voted to break format. What you're going to hear is one man's answer to the common claim that whatever you're born into, that's what you end up believing. It turns out we're nowhere near as bound by our context or education or experiences as some of us might believe. The human heart is capable of amazing left turns. I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

John Dickson:

This Episode is brought to you by Zondervan Academics' new book, Tactics, by Greg Koukl. Each week Undeceptions explores some aspect of life, faith, history, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we'll be trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

John Dickson:

Today's story is all about the geographical, personal and spiritual journey made by my new friend Rahil Patel. But before I hand over the mic to him, maybe a little context would be helpful. Rahil is a quiet spoken, unassuming man, who is born into a devout Hindu family in England. Their devotion to certain texts, rituals, and practices connects them to what many scholars call the oldest religion in the world. Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma, the eternal law, dates back as far as 1500 BC, maybe even earlier, but it's not an easy religion to grasp. When someone mentions the word Christianity, you know immediately it had something to do with a person called Christ. When we say Buddhism, we think of the Buddha, the man Siddhartha Gautama. But when we come to Hinduism, things aren't so simple. The name tells you zero about the content.

John Dickson:

There was no such person as Hindu to give us Hinduism, and people in India don't even call it Hinduism. That word just comes from the Indus River in India. So Hinduism is really just a Western way of saying the stuff people near the Indus River believe. It's not super helpful. But Sanatana Dharma, Hinduism is the world's third largest religion, with just over 1 billion followers. And they're United by some core beliefs. Here's a kind of cheat sheet for you. In Rahil's story, you'll hear about things like karma, that's the universal law of cause and effect. Your action determines reaction in this life and in the next life, because

Hindus believe in reincarnation of course. Then there's Atman, this is your true self, your very soul as distinct from the personality you think of as you. And connected to Atman is Brahman, this is the supreme spirit within and around everything. Now, for some Hindus, it's simply the impersonal animating principle of the universe. For others though, it's close to the Western concept of one universal god.

John Dickson:

And then there's Dharma or duties, the rights, laws and practices that produce good karma and bring a Hindu into harmony with Brahman. And that's where Rahil's story begins, striving for harmony.

John Dickson:

You were quite a devout child. Can you tell me your daily practice as a kid?

Rahil Patel:

Yeah. Daily practice in our home, we had a special room dedicated for the house shrine, where we had the images of the god that we worshiped as the supreme being. So for us and thousands of other similar families, waking up in the morning, the first thing we did was to have a bath, then wear fresh clothes. Then we all in the household had a special personal prayer kit with the relevant images of the god that we were worshipping. We'd pray for 20, 25 minutes. I would do that. And then you go downstairs into the house shrine and you do another ritual, a formal of worship for another 15, 20 minutes. And then you're allowed to drink water. Before any of this, you are not allowed to drink or eat anything. So after that worship ritual in the house shrine, I would have my breakfast and then I'd go to school.

Rahil Patel:

Coming back from school, the first thing you do is you obviously take off your shoes, shoes weren't allowed in the house anywhere. You go into the house shrine, you prostrate six times, you say a few prayers, and then you get down to your homework. When you know your homework time is over by say five, six o'clock, dad's home. Mom's got the food ready. We prepare a special dish or food for the images in the house shrine. We take the dish there, we worship, we offer the food to god first. For a good 30 minutes, that ritual takes place. Then we all sit down to eat. After dinner it would be maybe a bit of TV or reading. Then the family gets together again and we pray together for a good 25, 30 minutes that was called [foreign language 00:07:19], which means to hold a service or a kind of a, yeah, a service in your own home as a family discussing scriptures together. And then that would be around nine o'clock at night. And then everyone does whatever they feel, and then it's bedtime.

John Dickson:

You continued in this way and spent more and more time in your local temple.

Rahil Patel:

Yeah.

John Dickson:

But at 16 years of age, instead of starting a rock band, like I did you...

Rahil Patel:

I wish I did now.

John Dickson:

... You were set on quite a path after a speech you gave in the temple. Can you tell me what was the speech about and what path did it set you on?

Rahil Patel:

So our temple was in Northwest London, near where I had been raised and brought up. So I was by the age of 16, given the responsibilities to look after all the youth activities in the temple. And by this time, this is around 1988, this particular denomination was growing pretty fast. In terms of denominations, it was fairly new. It was only 300 years old compared to other denominations. And the guru was in London at the time of this speech. And in this particular Hindu practice, the guru is the vessel of god on earth. Whatever he says does is god saying and doing. When we look at him, we're looking at god. When we worship him, we worshiping god. So he was in the assembly. And I was asked to speak on a Hindu scripture, which basically means to believe yourself above from the three bodies, separate from the three states of evil, [foreign language 00:09:28], and worship your lord, your god. You are not this body. You are not belong to this world. You belong to him. So that was the verse, and I extrapolated in that for 20 minutes.

Rahil Patel:

There were about 3000 people in the congregation, and he was very happy. He was over the moon, which was a surprise to me. I went and bowed and took his blessings. And I still remember this vividly. He said, "You spoke very, very well and you have a good gift. You should become a priest." A Swami is the real name. It's a monastic lifestyle yet with a very evangelistic approach or practice. Immediately I said, yes, John, because that's god telling me. I'll be honest as well, getting that kind of recognition in front of 3000 people at the age of 16 from god is like, wow, you know? So it did feel looking back, it did fill my pride.

Rahil Patel:

It did fill certain gaps that I felt I had in my home, this father figure, incredible father figure. I said yes. And that moment was very mystical because he had a very mystical ambience about him. He was very

prophetic. He was very charismatic. He was a great listener. So this was in 1988. I just finished my GCSEs. He then went to America. I followed him to America, toured with him for two and a half months. And I just got so engrossed and I got really radical. This is the purpose of my life. This is my destiny. This is where I'm going to head, god, heaven serving him. Wow.

John Dickson:

There was no doubt in Rahil's mind that he would become a Swami, that's a master of the spiritual life. His parents weren't entirely happy with that though, mainly because of the strict vows it involved in his case. As a priest, he would swear never to meet or talk to his parents again. He wouldn't be paid. He couldn't touch money. He would commit to a life of celibacy. He wouldn't marry. He wouldn't even be allowed to talk to or intentionally look at a woman. And this was all part of his complete detachment from this world. And so in 1991, full of faith in his spiritual destiny, he left for a remote monastery in India.

John Dickson:

So you went to Gujarat-

Rahil Patel:

Gujarat, yes. Northwest-

John Dickson:

To the desert-

Rahil Patel:

To the desert area.

John Dickson:

And did training to become a priest. Can you tell me about the regime?

Rahil Patel:

Oh, it's tough, very vigorous. So you wake up at 4:30 every morning, latest quarter to five. Unless you're sick, you always have a cold water bath. You don't give your body the comfort of warm, comfortable water. You have that practice. You always have a bath with your robes on. You never take your robes off. You're never allowed to show that body. Then you sit down in your personal prayers for a good 45 minutes. Once the prayers are done, everybody on the campus, at the time, there were 150 of us. We get together in the main temple in the center and we worship together at six o'clock in the morning. And so that continues for about half an hour, 6:30. Then everyone's given chores to do. You sweep the grounds

or you clean the toilets, or you help make garlands for the images, or you help in the kitchen. That rotor changes every 14 days you do chores.

Rahil Patel:

Then 7:30, everyone has breakfast together. 8:30, 8:15 rather, the first sermon starts in the morning. This is off the main scripture the [foreign language 00:14:05] scripture. You take notes in that because every 14 days there's a three hour paper on all 14 sermons, and you are expected to score above 91% in that. From nine o'clock your classes start until, and your studies end at around seven o'clock at night. Your classes, sorry, finish at seven o'clock at night. But your studies continue till around 11:00 PM. So what happens in the day, different philosophies of the Hindu canvas. You study them in depth, the main scriptures, Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita you study. But then in more depth, this particular denomination and its scriptures were studied in much more depth.

Rahil Patel:

You have breaks throughout the day. You have three more worship gatherings to go to in the main temple as well. You have lunch, obviously. There is time for a nice afternoon, one hour nap. You do have to do either yoga or any normal conventional exercise. So you fit half an hour, 45 of that into your day. And so that's the usual typical day. And-

John Dickson:

How long are you doing this for? Over how many months, years?

Rahil Patel:

Six years. Six years is your basic. And then you also have the fasting in that you do five fasts a month minimum, which is 36 hours without food and water. And in that heat, I remember once John, I was up and I was walking up to the temple steps. It was six o'clock in the morning. It was so hot, 42 Celsius. I had faster the night before. I was in tears. Everything gets dry in your body and everything is dry. And the ground there, there's no carpet, everything heats up in the summer. So when you're sleeping on the floor, you only have a bedding three, four inches thick. The heat of the tiles goes right through the bedding and it doubles the heat. And there were 15 of us from England and America in the whole batch. So we struggled more than the average person there.

John Dickson:

You become a priest 1995, is that-

Rahil Patel:

'95 I was ordained.

John Dickson:

What did you do then? What is the role of a priest? What was your role as a priest?

Rahil Patel:

Different people are given different roles based on their giftings. My role was I spent a couple of years in Mumbai looking after youth activities. But then in 1997, more importantly, I was given the role of Europe and Russia to evangelize, set up temples, build the congregation, raise funds for more activities.

John Dickson:

Hinduism had experienced some success in the west, in America, the UK and Australia, but Europe was different. It was kind of baron territory. In fact, similar to the way Christianity has struggled in Europe. I mean, since the 18th Century, much of Europe has been stridently secularist, preferring to exclude any kind of spirituality from the public square. So Rahil had a huge task building the Hindu faith from the ground up.

Rahil Patel:

You find one person, you find one family who's really dedicated, very loyal. Until there isn't one of those you don't even bother going to a city. Now, we did go to some cities where there was no one, and there was some guy who might just want to host you and do a big assembly. That was fine, but that wasn't really our priority. Because, we knew that once we left, no one's going to continue the work. So you find one family, and then you really invest. And I think this is what's really powerful is, when we had a congregation, we wouldn't just give a sermon and a speech or a lecture. We were very involved in their lives. We'd go to their homes. We'd listen to their problems. We'd connect them with other people who had businesses, if they needed help in that area. We'd connect them, if they needed a job. We'd be so involved in day to day. And we would sit there and spend time with them, and eat with them.

Rahil Patel:

This was the most important thing taught in the monastery, that eating with your disciples and followers is more important than your fancy sermon. So every center, all 9,000 centres across the globe, every Saturday, every Sunday, it was a principle, there's food for everyone supplied by the temple and center, abundant. And the principle was there should be food left over, there should never be not enough food. So that's a way of also connecting and bringing people together. And it's weird, eating with people isn't really written down in any spiritual book, but it has a very deep spiritual dimension. And we had a strong belief in that. So going to their homes, eating with them, listening to their problems, really looking after them genuinely, being available. We didn't have a Sabbath. We didn't know the concept Friday off or a Sunday off. It was six o'clock in the morning till 11:00 at night. And so that's the kind of investment you do in people. Once you get one, then he starts developing families. He starts bringing people together. He'll introduce you to more people when you go next time. And that's how it grows.

John Dickson:

It's important to understand though, that Hinduism isn't just offering people a lifestyle. It's actually about escape. Escaping this cycle of birth, a life of pain, and then rebirth into a new life of pain. That's the key to understanding Hinduism.

Rahil Patel:

The key question it tries to answer is, how can you release yourself from the bondage of reincarnation, this physical body that has its evils of lust, anger, greed, jealousy, [inaudible 00:21:05], and have ultimate and have ecstasy with god through worship here on earth. And once your soul is enlightened, sit in that relevant heaven, because they believe in the multiverse, in that relevant heaven. So how can you do that? Right? How can you achieve that? And this is the question you actually ask a Hindu. As a non-Hindu you don't say, "Which god do you believe in?" You actually say, "What's your spiritual practice?" That goes to the person. Yeah. So that's the question that a Hindu would ask. How would you answer it? It depends on which schools or philosophy you're from. And Advaita, who's fundamentals are rooted in Monism, would say meditate on the Brahman, who is one and who is in me, et cetera, et cetera.

John Dickson:

This is the path of knowledge.

Rahil Patel:

Yeah. This is the path of knowledge. This is the path of eradicating desires and bondages for this body. Just meditate on Brahman. [crosstalk 00:22:25] means I am the Brahman. I am one with the Brahman. That's what they would say as an answer, as one of the answers, I'm simplifying. A Vishishtadvait, who has a very personal god, a very intimate god, who for example, Krishna, they would say, believe something like believe yourself as the Artman, not this body. Delve deep into that belief on a daily basis, practice that belief that you are the Artman, not this body. And offer worship to Krishna as your personal god.

John Dickson:

Am I correct in thinking that this is sort of the principle answer that Krishna gives Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita?

Rahil Patel:

Yeah.

John Dickson:

So it's Bhakti, right?

John Dickson:

The Bhagavad Gita is perhaps the most popular portion of the Hindu scriptures. It's a poetic conversation between Prince Arjuna, an ancient clan leader, and his charioteer and advisor, who turns out to be that god Krishna. Krishna reveals to Prince Arjuna the three ways of liberation from this world. One is the path of deeds, that's doing enough good in life that you improve your station in the next life. One is the path of knowledge, which basically involves study, meditation and ascetic practices. But the third is the path known as Bhakti, devotion. If you give yourself holy to your favoured god, you'll be divinely helped toward liberation. And Krishna says to Arjuna, this is the best path to take.

John Dickson:

So you're saved through devotion.

Rahil Patel:

Through devotion, through devotion. And the claim is that karma is eradicated the more you do devotion. That's how it's eradicated. Whether you still or feel the weight of karma is another debate altogether. Because Arjuna did feel that weight after the war was over, he did exactly what Krishna said. Krishna said to him, this is a [foreign language 00:24:45], this is a righteous war. In the [inaudible 00:24:47] scripture, he did everything he could to avert war, to stop it. And yet Duryodhana didn't agree. The opposite family member. So war was inevitable. Arjuna was set up to kill his own brothers and his own guru, his teacher, in archery, everything. So, this is the very important question here, because Arjuna is on the battlefield and the armies are lined up and he looks at his family members.

Rahil Patel:

He looks at Bhishma, his guru who taught him all the skills he has. And he turns to his charioteer, who's Krishna, and says [foreign language 00:25:25]. That's the Sanskrit [inaudible 00:25:33], "My bones are trembling now, my hairs are standing on end. My mouth is dry. What do I do?" Krishna says, "This is not the karma that you think it is. I am telling you to do this. So this is not karma. This will not attach." And yet when the war is won by the Pandava family and Krishna, primarily due to Arjuna, after the war, when you look at the disciples and you see Arjuna's life or his brothers, Bhima or Sahadeva, or Nakula, or Yudhishtira, when you look at how the lives panned out, you still see the weight of karma, of condemnation, of guilt, very prevalent in their lives.

John Dickson:

Guilt is part of the human condition it seems, our sense of it and our longing to get rid of it. And as educated and devout as Rahil was, guilt was the rock his Hinduism struck head on.

Rahil Patel:

It doesn't pan out. I mean, in my life, let's look at my life. Let's just look, come close. We don't need to go three and a half thousand years back. We come to my life, right? My guru was the personification of swami on earth, the Supreme Brahman on earth. And again it was very clear, your karma, your evil thoughts that you have now and then, which is also karma, right? They're vanquished by the guru's blessings and his grace. Right, okay. I understood that intellectually. I understood that from scripture. Did I have that deep sense in my conscience that I am completely free from all this, that I'm completely removed from all this? Did I feel no burden? No. And it's cheeky, but I don't think any of my colleagues felt that either. Which was my very first question in my first month in training in 1991, to the guru. In November, 1991, he came to the monastery just to check on us, how we're doing, what's going on. I said, "There have been priests since south for 40 years practicing. Sincerely, I don't see the inner change that's promised. I see brilliant external vows, disciplines, practices. Wonderful. It's mind blowing, but where's the inner change? Where's this sense of joy or this real peace?"

Rahil Patel:

Now here's just a one important thought, John, before we go to your next question, the word peace, right? In all of the Hindu religions is closer to the concept of indifference. We looked very peaceful to our whole congregation. I've had those comments so many times. Yeah, I was riddled with anxiety. Now, indifference is not the same as peace. Indifference comes from detachment to the world, which requires to a good degree of hardened heart. But on the face, it looks very spiritual. It looks very calm. Things don't bother you. Things don't trouble you. Things don't affect you. You know how to create an equilibrium state in your mind through that detachment practice. In that worldview, there has to be certain circumstances for you to have that sense of peace. You have to be in a certain place or a certain posture. Why I want to make that point is, a lot of Westerners get drawn to the peace and the calm or Eastern mysticism without really knowing the layers underneath.

John Dickson:

So what happens when someone as deeply committed to Hinduism, as Rahil, can't find the peace he hoped for, and begins to doubt the very structure of his faith? That's where we go after the break.

John Dickson:

This episode is brought to you by Zondervan Academic's new book, *Tactics*, by Greg Koukl. It's a 10th anniversary updated edition. It's a kind of primer on how to talk about Christianity in public. It's the kind of thing that *Undeceptions* is all about. There are so many difficult questions our culture raises about the Christian faith. Is the Bible reliable? How could there only be one way to God? Isn't faith the opposite of knowledge? And on and on it goes. And what Koukl does in this book is he clearly lays out the complaint and then he proposes ways to discuss these things in a sensible manner. One of the keys he says is finding the question behind the question, the worldview or faith commitment that drives the complaint

in the first place. Koukl has been running seminars on this stuff for decades. So the book is full of knowhow, not just theory, but practical knowhow. The book is clearly pitched to people who are Christians wanting to have healthy conversations with those who don't believe. But actually I think doubters would find benefit from this book. It might give you better tactics to counter Christians actually, but it might also challenge the basis of some of your doubts about the Christian faith. Anyway, head to zondervanacademic.com or any of the online booksellers and check out Greg Koukl's Tactics, A Game Plan For Discussing Christian Convictions.

John Dickson:

Have you thought of studying online? Ridley College offers a range of online courses from certificate level to master's degrees, old Testament, new Testament, theology, apologetics, church history and so on. Soon I'll be teaching historical Jesus online for them. Ridley brings the best in theological education right to your fingertips, head to ridley.edu.au/Undeceptions. That's ridley.edu.au/Undeceptions. Check them out. I love them.

John Dickson:

You started to have lots of doubts and questions.

Rahil Patel:

Yeah.

John Dickson:

And did they get you into trouble?

Rahil Patel:

They got me into trouble. I believe I was very free with the guru. I was one of his really favourite disciples. He had 800 at the time. I was one of the youngest. I never had to go through the hierarchy to reach him. He had given me a blank check, "Whenever you want to call me, I'll be available." And he was like a father, as well as a god to me. I was very open with him. So from day one, I was obviously sharing my doubts, my questions, even about his whole divinity. I had just had genuine questions. I wasn't trying to be an anarchist. I didn't know though, John, that over, I'd say from 2005 onwards, I didn't know that this was building up in his mind, my questions and doubts.

Rahil Patel:

At the same time, I started looking back into other Hindu scriptures to find deeper answers to truth. I started having this secret sort of fascination towards Christ, even though I was wearing these orange robes. I just loved looking at the cross. I didn't know exactly the true deep meaning. I knew he was crucified from my school days. Didn't know what it meant. So I found that quite attractive. I started going

in churches more. It wasn't so much the art and architecture. I just felt there was something there that was really attractive. But by that time, my position was very senior, so no one questioned me going into a church. If anyone did, I said, "I'm just learning from the Christians. Just want to see what they're doing, how they operate, how they manage, how they evangelized." That's what I said. People bought that.

Rahil Patel:

But as I travelled more and more, and I met people outside of the fold, my view of God started to change, in that I started believing him to be much bigger, more diverse, more beautiful, a borderless kind of God, not tied into a guru or an image in a temple. And so in a very subtle way, I used to bring these into my speeches. And to my surprise, people were really enjoying this. And I thought, this is really strange. In Orlando, 2007, a national convention, I was given a keynote speech for 10 minutes. I read a Hindu verse and I gave an interpretation entirely from my own experiences of what I was seeing throughout my travels. John, the whole crowd, there were 8,000, they stood up, started clapping. It was the most bizarre thing. I remember I sat down next to my friend, he's a priest as well from England, a dentist. He says, "Wow, how'd you interpret that verse like that? I found it fascinating." I didn't sell him. I said, "Well, only if you knew, that had nothing to do with Hindu scripture."

John Dickson:

So you're saying you were sort of almost secretly preaching a Christian vision of God...

Rahil Patel:

Yes.

John Dickson:

... under the pretext of a Hindu scripture.

Rahil Patel:

Yes. Yes. Which was quite cheeky.

John Dickson:

And you got into trouble eventually for doing that, did you not?

Rahil Patel:

I did get into trouble. I didn't know it was all building up in the background. No one was telling me. I felt sick quite a lot. 2010, I was really sick. I was on about 40 tablets a day. I was in and out of really good clinics here in London, but they found a clinic in Florida, the Mayo clinic in Jacksonville, Florida. I spent 10 months there, had five doctors on my case. Each of them like chairmans of their department. "What is wrong with you? You're only 40 years old. You've got all these issues." One of them is still a friend of

mine. Came back to London, this is 2011, October. And I hadn't met the guru now for a good one and a half years. So I thought let's go and see him. Even though I had all this baggage of doubts and whatever, he's still my father and I'm still in this now. It's 19, 20 years now. Just go with it. Go and see him in Bombay.

Rahil Patel:

And I landed in Bombay and someone, as I approached the temple, a friend of mine, a priest, he said, "Look, just be careful. There's a plot against you. There's some whispers going on about you." I said, "No one's told me this." I wasn't that naive. I would know. He said, "Look, before you go and see Guruji, just remember, just submit to whatever he says." And so anyway, I went into the room. This is what I thought, John. I said, "Well, he's always had my back. I'll meet him personally, which I always have the chance to do. I'll tell him whatever he feels wrong and I'll handle the rest of the seniors after that." But when I walked into the room, a whole group of very senior and like the Cardinal, they walked in with me and the issue was my theology. It was my preaching. It was my speaking. And so he said, "Look, I'm keeping you now in a village in India. You have too much influence on people's minds." And for the first time, John, in my 20 years, I said no to god, "I'm not obey that." And I didn't even know how I said that.

Rahil Patel:

The room went kind of silent. He said, "All right, look, I'll put you in the US, in a small town, but not in England. Not in London, not in a city like that." Again, I said no. And then they all started debating about my theology. "He should stay in India for a while, sit with this Swami for a while, get his doctrine really solidified and..." It went on for about five, 10 minutes. And then I just did a sigh, I went... I said, "Look, I just want to go home. I don't want to be a swami anymore." And how that came out of my mouth, I have got no clue. The room went silent. And to my shock and yet peace of mind, he said, "Fine, go."

Rahil Patel:

After 20 years, was that it? Like go. There was nothing in Europe. I built 500 people there. You've got temples now in Antwerp, Paris, Lisbon. You've got 18 centres. Is that it, just go? John, my mind just froze. He said, "On two conditions, don't talk to anyone that you know in the organization and never give a speech again in your life." I said fine, 'cause I didn't believe anything I was speaking anyway. I used to say that to people on the mic. I didn't say that, sorry. I said, "Please don't record this sermon." They thought I was being humble. I was saying that because I don't believe it. I asked my followers in Norway once, I said, "Do you believe everything I tell you?" They said, "You're wearing these orange robes. You're not married. You don't get paid. Look at you sacrifice, you must be telling the truth." And I thought, is that your measure of truth? I thought, how easy is it to control thousands of people by giving such a holy appearance?

Rahil Patel:

So I said, "Fine, I won't speak." And then that night they gave me two pairs of trousers, two shirts. They took everything that was orange back, which is the traditional, the norm. My parents were told that he's coming back. Where do I go? 'Cause they had now moved to Dubai. Where do I go in London? So one friend put me up in his hotel in London. He said, "Come and stay here. I won't tell anyone that you are here, and let's find a job for you." At the age of 40. So I landed in London in December 27th, 2011, went straight to South Kensington where his hotel was. And I had given up my search for God and everything that I started out when I was 14, 15, 16. Disappointed because I did a lot, John. I did a 2000 mile pilgrimage across India. I climbed Mount Girnar three times. That's 10,000 steps offered worship to the shrine, Dattatreya. I read all these books. [inaudible 00:42:12] transcendental mind, Vivekananda's works, and meditation, this and that practice. I said, "Forget it." So, really disappointed.

Rahil Patel:

I came back peaceful that I had left, chapter closed, but disappointed with like this whole God thing.

John Dickson:

Rahil had come full circle, returning to London a very much disillusioned man with seemingly nothing to show for decades of devotion, except an abiding realization that his faith had delivered none of the peace or sense of fulfillment he'd been seeking

Rahil Patel:

Mid Jan, 2012, I was working to South Kensington Station, which is in the city of London. And I was just focused going. And I remember I was crossing Bute street. I was just looking at the station and my head literally turned 90 degrees. And I saw this beautiful church down this quiet road. It's Holy Trinity Brampton's Church, sort of plant. I thought, that must be a nice one like the ones in Rome with all these paintings and things. I had no clue that it would be bland and everything inside. I said, "Let's go and have a look. Then I'll go to the West End." It was a Sunday morning around 11:15 AM. So I went down this road. And as I came to the door of the church, there were these two guys, Australians, Josh and Sarah, were standing at the door. And I remember they had this love just like oozing out of them. It was so creepy. It was so attractive and yet, oh, not acquainted with that.

Rahil Patel:

I walked past them. And as I entered into the church, my first few steps, the presence of God just fell on me with this beautiful, it was just this blanket of this deep peace. And I heard this whisper of, it wasn't audible, but this sense of, "You're home." Why that's important? Because that same authentic voice, 20 years earlier in the month of November, when I was in my first month of training in the monastery, I was prostrating to the images with all the other 150 Swamis. That voice came and said, "Have you made the right decision? Are you in the right place?" And I stood up from my prostrations and I went to the

balcony of the temple and I said, "What have I done?" But then I thought, this must be Maya, the Hindu version of devil stopping me in my destiny. So I suppressed it. That voice did come a couple of times after that, once when I was reading Swami Vivekananda's works. It just came. It wasn't audible, but it said, "Jesus Christ of Nazareth." It was such a beautiful, authentic voice. I just had to shake it off. I was in my monastery in my office, in my orange robes. But that's what happened on that day in 2012 is, "You're home."

Rahil Patel:

I went upstairs and heard the sermon, the worship. I'd never seen worship on drums and guitars. I didn't go down for prayer. I went back to the hotel. I sat on my bed. I didn't say any specific prayer. I just said, "Yes." I remember saying that to myself, "Yes," which for me was fascinating. Because, to convince me, when I was priest about anything, wasn't that easy. I was very difficult to debate with. Not out of rebellion. They would hold certain board meetings when I was in Europe, if they wanted to get something passed. And they knew that if I'm there, I'd change the course of the meeting, I wouldn't let certain things pass. And for this encounter then for me was that much more fascinating that no one preached, no one gave a sermon. It was just His presence.

John Dickson:

But what content did you have for Jesus of Nazareth?

Rahil Patel:

At that time, in that moment, on that day? Nothing. I can't articulate anything except for, is very attractive. There was something, there's a pull. There was some sort of really attractive pull about even the name, Jesus of Nazareth. And I still find that really attractive today, just saying that. Even as a priest, when I would hear the word Messiah, it was so attractive. I remember taking off at Heathrow and looking out the window and just saying the word Messiah twice, because I'd read it somewhere. And it was such a beautiful feeling, Messiah, you know? And so that's the only content I had.

John Dickson:

It wasn't a simple journey from there for Rahil. And if you want more details than we can cram into this episode, he's actually written about his spiritual journey toward Christianity in a book beautifully titled, *Found By Love*. And we'll put a link in the show notes. Investigating his doubts, following that voice that spoke to him has resulted in many professional and personal losses. But Rahil can only talk of the gains he's made.

Rahil Patel:

It's huge. Only one who's pursued karma would know the difference between karma and grace. You're standing there and you haven't got a clue what's going on, and the presence of God just comes and sits and does communion with your own spirit. That's mind blowing.

John Dickson:

Does this change feel like a cultural betrayal? Obviously you had Hindu friends and family who just see this as a betrayal of all that you are. And I can imagine that it would affect you, and you would somehow feel psychologically treacherous.

Rahil Patel:

That particular organization and the people within it, my good guess is, because I had no contact, my good guess is that they all felt a deep betrayal. I also felt huge rejection, if that makes sense, and abandonment, okay? This was the deep feeling in me for a good two years until God started healing me and taking me on the journey of rejection and feeling treacherous and feeling like a back stabber. So I don't feel that now. I don't feel treacherous. I don't feel any of that. I'm completely free of that. From their point of view, I do get some beautiful messages from them now. Some of them have read my book, some really beautiful, kind messages, "Really happy for you. We miss you. You were very different. I'd love to see you at some stage." A couple of the people have met me. I've heard that some of the priests have read my book. They found it very honouring, which was a testimony to what Jesus has done in my heart in terms of forgiveness. Because I journeyed through a lot of that and I still am.

Rahil Patel:

Culturally, I don't feel I have to be a westerner to worship Jesus. But because of where I landed up geographically, I'm not usually worshiping with a lot of Asian Indians. But the kind of people God put me with in the very beginning were very much of that sort of posture of worship, if I want to say that. I do miss things about the culture of that life. I do miss the sense of community. It wasn't something you did on a Tuesday or a Sunday lunchtime. It was a way of life. I'd say, if I were still in those clothes and still in that time, disciplines, daily spiritual practices or lack of. I wouldn't use the words, but I'd say something along the lines of cheap grace. I did say to my guru once in a small village, we were there, and I said, "These Christians have got some good things." He said, "Yeah, they may be good at administration and management and all those kind of things, but there's nothing else in their character." I would say the main thing is lacking disciplines, and somehow I still feel that today.

Rahil Patel:

And discipline, I think in a lot of Western culture is misconstrued as punishment. Discipline can come out of religion, but it can also come out of romance. When you're in love with someone, which brings me to my final point, and I think the devotion side of Christianity, if I was standing in those robes 10 years ago,

the whole devotion side is very shallow or lacking. Culturally, when I go to certain churches in America or India, which are predominantly Indian people, they still take off their shoes when they go in the church, they still have their instruments, Indian instruments, their sing liturgy with the Sanskrit intonations. I've seen all that. So I don't feel I have to let go of a culture, but that's the sort of thing I miss.

Rahil Patel:

I do miss some of those people, I do. My brother's still there. I'm not allowed to talk to him. So there are some... It's something like you said in class, John, and this is really, you said it beautifully. And this is how I sort of say, there are other faiths and cultures that have Kingdom truths that are not always in the church, but they are from Christ.

John Dickson:

Can I ask you a final double barrelled question?

Rahil Patel:

If I've not bored you enough so far?

John Dickson:

No. Here's my double barrel question. Can you help my listeners, most of whom are not believers?

Rahil Patel:

Okay.

John Dickson:

Describe the most attractive thing about Hinduism for a believing Hindu. And then I want you to tell me the most attractive thing about Christ for you now.

Rahil Patel:

The most attractive thing for a Hindu believer is a deep sense of belonging to a community, to a group of people who are practicing, worshiping, doing life together. I think that's the most attractive thing. I will say, they may not see it as that until they're removed from it, because it's so intrinsic. The attraction is fulfilled. I'd say a deep sense of belonging. In Christ right now, the most attractive thing is encountering the tangible, available presence of God through Christ. That deep joy, that peace, that love that nourishes not just your, these aren't just words. I'm not just saying words, because I've done Eastern practice. The presence of God satisfies every part of your being, and that's available every single day throughout the day. You just posture your heart, your intention to Him, your affection to Him and He comes. And whether you are in a difficult storm of life or whether you are in a bit of anxiety here and there, there is something available that comes in, and not just intellectually gives you perspective, but

changes your whole being in that instant. Whereby you don't have to intellectualize about your current circumstances, however difficult they are. You just have this incredible peace that you know that's come from somewhere else. You know haven't worked so hard to get the peace or worked to get that joy.

Rahil Patel:

So what I would say is just irrelevant of circumstances, this incredible, deep joy, peace, love. And most importantly attractive is when I fall short, when I make a mistake, when I think something wrong, that engagement with His presence cleanses the consciousness. You're just free of all your shortcomings. You're not burdened by karma. That's impossible elsewhere. That's impossible. You're not burdened by all your shortcomings. You said something stupid, you thought something bad. His presence, it's, I'm loved as I am, John. There's nothing more I can do that would make Him love me more. And there's nothing I have done that would make Him love me any less. I am loved as I am right now. And that for me is the most freeing thing. I'm loved.

John Dickson:

Hey, thanks for indulging us as we set aside the usual Undeceptions format this week. I hope you enjoyed hearing Rahil's story as much as I did. Actually Rahil will feature in a series later in the year when we talk about the similarities and differences between Christianity and the world's other major religions. He has an amazing way of comparing Krishna and Jesus, as well as some insights into what Christians could learn from Hindus. I felt quite challenged by those remarks. Look out for that.

John Dickson:

If you've got any questions about this or other episodes, I'd love to hear them, and we'll try and answer them in our upcoming Q and A episode. You can tweet us at Undeceptions. That's pretty simple. Send us a regular old email at questions@undeceptions.com, or if you're brave, record your question for the show by heading to undeceptions.com and pressing the little button that says record your comment or something like that. We'd love to hear our listeners. And while you're there, check out everything related to this episode and sign up for the Undeceptions newsletter to get access to bonus content and plenty more from each episode.

John Dickson:

And while I've got you, let me give a quick shout out to a sister podcast on the Eternity Podcast Network. That's Salt, with Jenny Salt. If you like the conversation hour on the ABC and there are plenty of others on the BBC and NPR, then you'll love Salt. Great in depth interviews about people whose lives have been transformed by spiritual connections. A new-ager, who became a New York documentary maker, a doctor at the heart of life renewing surgery in the heart of Africa, a man whose family saw Christianity arrive in Nepal and took it to the heights of that great country. Salt on the Eternity Podcast, Network eternitypodcasts.com. Next episode, Confronting Christianity, that's the title of one of the best defences

of the Christian faith I've read in the last 10 years. So I hopped on a plane and raced over to Boston, Massachusetts, to interview the author. She is quite something. See ya.

John Dickson:

Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dickson. Directed and produced by Mark Hadley, who normally provides me with lollies, but hasn't today. Our consulting producer is Kaylee Payne. Our theme song is by Bach, arranged by me and played by the fabulous Undeceptions band. Editing is by Bryce McLean. Special thanks to our series sponsor Zondervan Academic, for making this Undeception possible. Undeceptions is part of the Eternity Podcast Network, an audio collection showcasing the seriously good news of faith today. Head to undeceptions.com, you'll find show notes and other related stuff for our episodes. Over the coming weeks, we're transforming the undeceptions.com website into a whole library of audio, video and printable material. Lots of different stuff from different communicators designed to undeceive and let the truth out.

Speaker 3:

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