

RamDev Dale Borglum Interview

Karen Wyatt: [00:00:00] Today I'm very happy to welcome my special guest, RamDev Dale [00:01:00] Borglum. Dale is the author of *How to Live So You Can Die Without Fear*, and the executive director of the Living Dying Project. A pioneering figure in the conscious dying movement, he spent decades helping people face death and life with greater awareness, and has collaborated with leaders in the field, including Ram Dass, Stephen Levine, and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Drawing on his background as a mathematician, meditation teacher, lover of God, and devoted practitioner of both Eastern and Western healing traditions, Dale offers a uniquely practical and accessible map to the healing path. You can visit the website online at livingdying.org. And the title of the book again is *How to Live So You Can Die Without Fear*. So Dale, thank you so much for joining me today. I'm looking forward to talking with you.

RamDev Dale Borglum: My pleasure. So much glad to be here.

Karen Wyatt: I've been reading your wonderful book and really [00:02:00] enjoying it, and I'm excited to get into that, but, you have an interesting story, an interesting path, having started out as a mathematician and in academia, and I wondered if you could give us just a synopsis of how you ended up eventually working with conscious dying.

RamDev Dale Borglum: It's a long story. Let's keep it short if I can. But I was getting my PhD at Stanford, and whenever Ram Dass would come to Northern California, he'd stay right across the street from me at a mutual friend's house. So I got to know Ram Dass when I was a graduate student, and, followed him off to India. I met his guru, my guru, came back, and eventually became the executive director of his nonprofit foundation, the Hanuman Foundation, an umbrella foundation to do service-oriented good things.

He had been interested for many [00:03:00] years in the notion of conscious dying. He was friends with Aldous Huxley, who wrote a book called *Island*. And in *Island*, there was this utopian community in which they had a center for conscious dying, where conscious dying really just means bringing the contemplative traditions into the bedroom with dying, right?

so there were books about conscious golfing and conscious gardening, but conscious dying was still... There's still too much fear about that. And Ram Dass talked about this, and nobody wanted to pay attention. Eventually then,

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross came to the fore, and she wrote *On Death and Dying*, and she ended up coming to a workshop that Ram Dass taught on the East Coast, at which Stephen Levine was the Buddhist meditation teacher.

So Elizabeth and Stephen really hit it off. She invited him to be the meditation [00:04:00] teacher at her retreats. He did that for a while, teaching meditation at the dying retreats, and you can't be at those retreats and just be the meditation teacher. People are dying and grieving and having these really very engaging human stories.

so Stephen was really drawn into this work, and eventually Stephen and Elizabeth parted ways very amicably, but she was getting more involved with violent psychodrama, which didn't dovetail too well with Buddhist meditation, right? So Stephen happened to be living in Santa Cruz, and Ram Dass and I and a third friend were living in SoCal right next to Santa Cruz.

So Ram Dass invited Stephen to do what he was doing but doing it as part of our foundation. And very quickly Ram Dass and I thought, "Hey, this is the most interesting thing going on in the foundation," and we started teaching with Stephen back in the late [00:05:00] 1970s, 1978, 1979. And then at the very beginning of 1980 we all moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico to start the first Center for Conscious Dying in the West.

Stephen met his wife to be. He ran off with her, and Ram Dass is very good at initiating things but not so great at follow through, so he went off that way. And there I was in Santa Fe. I said, why don't I do it?" And from 1980 to 1984 I directed this thing called The Dying Center where people came from around the country to die consciously.

We had people on the staff, meditators working with people with life-threatening illnesses. So that's how I got into the work.

Karen Wyatt: Wow. So you were really on the forefront of the, conscious dying movement, I guess we can call it, or even awareness of conscious dying. not... not that no one was aware of it before, but in terms of it becoming [00:06:00] more, more mainstream in society.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yes. And of course, Ram Dass is dead, and Stephen Levine is dead, and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is dead. And yet, then we're being joined by Joan Halifax and Frank Ostaseski, and, basically this is becoming, in some ways a much hotter topic. At the same time, we had expected that there

would be dying centers in every medium and large sized community in America, and we would be the Colonel Sanders of death.

But it turned out that there's still, the funding for doing this is really not there. And certainly the individual hospices and hospitals are as conscious as the individual beings working there.

But hospice has really lost sight in some [00:07:00] major way, unfortunately, of its spiritual roots. It's becoming, it's become big business.

And, once again, hospice is a, a, a wonderful thing, but it really began as a spiritual movement in England, and then the first two hospices in America were, one in New Haven, Connecticut, the first one, and then the second one here where I live in Marin, County, north of San Francisco.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. And I think as you, you say that so well about that hospice has really sadly become a business because it's part of our healthcare system, which has also become a business.

And the spiritual roots, as you say, have been left out of it, which is very sad. It is. And yet it seems that, what we, some of us who have taken a spiritual path have learned that all roads somehow lead us toward death eventually because we all die eventually. [00:08:00] Eventually. Ultimately, that's the question we end up needing to ask and seek an answer for.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah. in, in Buddhism, before you begin to practice, they have these contemplations, these mind-turning truths that turn your mind toward the Dharma, toward awakening. And the first one is you're gonna die, but you don't know when.

Various o- very obvious intellectually. But how many people are really living a life that you could

that you, really know that you might not be alive tomorrow, that this is the moment, this interview, you and me and all the listeners, this is the moment we've got, right? And the statistics are probably pretty good that you and I are gonna be alive after the interview, but you don't really know, right?

And if, we don't really know, how does that affect the way that you and I interact with each other and love each other and be vulnerable a- and be caring? R- [00:09:00] and obviously, maybe not obviously, but in my humble opinion, at least, as true as this is for working with individuals, if we look around here

collectively what's going on right now on this planet, political divisiveness, AI, climate change, social injustice, on and on. Not only are there things out of balance, but they're going in the wrong direction, right? And you look into the future and say, "What, what's going on here?" And basically, my, it, my view of things is the only way this is gonna change is by deep inner transformation with enough people. It's fine to go out and write a letter to your congressperson or, be an activist, but we just need enough people to- Be relating to all these imbalances from the heart rather than [00:10:00] trying to figure it out with the mind.

And transformation happens through very just different ways: near-death experiences, trauma, psychedelics, and deep inner contemplative work, prayer, and meditation. I don't think we can expect our country to everybody take psychedelics or start meditating.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

RamDev Dale Borlum: But, there's this, this collective trauma.

one friend of mine is a healer who says, he said to me, "Almost everybody I meet is exhausted." People are exhausted by what it is that's going on, and let's hope we hope that we don't have to get to a collective near-death experience. Let's, leave it at the point of trauma here and see if the, the collective trauma can be something that begins to wake us up collectively.

And I really feel then that this, the fact that we're gonna die is at the core of all the other fears, that fear of death is [00:11:00] the root of all fear, and that fear of death is exactly the outline of where you're not enlightened.

The place where you're stuck in separateness. Now, you and I are separate.

You're a woman, I'm a man. You're in Southern California, I'm in Northern California. But there's another level of consciousness where not only are we connected and interdependent, we're one. And when you're working with dying, life in general, particularly working with dying, to me it seems that there's two things to do, to be with the human story, to be with people are suffering, and people are dying, and people are grieving, and we're finite, and, we have bodies and personalities.

But not to forget that it's all contextualized in, great perfection, in wholeness.

Right? The... And so there are people that are very good at doing one or the other, being with the, the human [00:12:00] story of the person who's dying and feeling the sadness of it, or people are really spiritual and, "Oh, it's all perfect, it's all God's will."

Can you do both at the same time? And that's the challenge. That's the challenge.

Karen Wyatt: You're so right about that. For the people who are really good at being with the physical suffering sometimes are the people who get burned out and exhausted because they're giving so much of themselves, but they may not have spiritual tools that help them replenish themselves and care for themselves in that act.

RamDev Dale Borglum: So the Tibetan Buddhists have this really remarkable notion, I think, which is that compassion is a mixture of sadness and joy.

And people are getting burned out as caregivers. there's this expression that they're experiencing compassion fatigue.

And I don't think compassion fatigue exists, that if you [00:13:00] truly are compassionate, your heart is spacious.

There will not be fatigue, that the fatigue comes from not being compassionate, wanting to be compassionate, being a bit compassionate. So what's being said here is that, yes, I feel sad that people are dying, that suffering is going on, there's social injustice, but there's a joyfulness because my heart is so open.

A joy that transcends happiness and sadness, right? So can we be holding... Once again, it's that twofold nature of being, that the finite part of it that we're sad about because there is so much suffering, and I can be joyful because my heart is wide open. And once again, that's the challenge of a lifetime for almost all of us.

Karen Wyatt: So, very true, and it speaks to why sometimes death awareness or b- be- or being confronted with death is, one of the doorways that opens us up to that, kind of wisdom and [00:14:00] to the possibility of opening our hearts and experiencing joy.

I wanted to ask a little bit about, in the book you talk about a practical map to the healing path that, that you created, and I wondered if you'd talk about those, the five steps of that map.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah. So I, I wanna do some balancing here of saying I'm not saying anything new, but I'm saying old stuff in a brand new way.

So, many people have talked about the healing path. There's seven chakras and the 12 steps of the 12 step program and the three yanas of Buddhism and on. and I have... First of all, all of this comes from personal experience. Ram Dass, as I talked about in the book, said to me that I have the longest dark night of the soul of anybody he'd ever met.[00:15:00]

I, was a really stubborn person, right? So I had to find my way out of this on my own. I had wonderful teachers, the best teachers, traveling all around the planet to find people. But, and I've been a meditation teacher and a guide to the dying for 45 plus years now, and what I learned is that there is a path that is available to people who are Buddhists, who are Christians, who are Hindus, who are agnostics, who are atheists, who are Sufis.

And the world doesn't need another Buddhist book about dying. There's plenty of those out there as far as I'm concerned. when I first got into this work, I took my copy of Who Dies by Stephen Levine and gave it to my dad, who's a very smart guy, and he read the book and he came back to me and said, "I'm sure your friend is a wonderful person, but I have no idea what he's talking about."

My [00:16:00] dad was a Lutheran. The whole... This whole thing about Buddhists was like his head just... it didn't wrap around that stuff. So I put together this really accessible path that, which I think I've had some ability to do because of my mathematical training, that I, can see the patterns in things.

Mathematics almost drove me crazy. I'm not saying anybody else should try to get into mathematics necessarily. But it, among other things, allowed me to see how the 12 step program and, the stages of early childhood development and the chakras are saying exactly the same thing in lockstep, and it can show us where we are and what we need to do next, where we're stuck.

So there are these five stages of healing, and there are three channels. There's the body channel martial arts, Hatha yoga, energy yoga, stuff like that. There's [00:17:00] the mind channel, psychotherapy, meditation, and there's the channel of spirit, devotion, heart practice, et cetera. And the five stages are motivation.

To begin, you need to be w- motivated, because we're gonna have to look at difficult things along the way. You're gonna see your own narcissism and your own cowardice and your own fear, guilt, and shame. People come to me and say, "I want to die consciously. I want to be a much better meditator.

I want my heart to open," and they're coming in lugging a big bag of fear, guilt, and shame. And I say, maybe we should deal with some of that stuff a little bit first here before we try to rip your heart open." So Motivation. What do you really want? What is your heart's desire? what is it you want to have happen before you die?

What is your heart telling you? what, what is your heart yearning for?
[00:18:00] And until we really Connect with that motivation. Spiritual practice will have the quality of being very sporadic because again and again, we're gonna be overwhelmed by our emotions, by our thought patterns. And once again, almost nobody can do all this stuff on their own.

finding teachers, and therapists, and groups of course, but I hope this path helps people pick the next thing to do. So first of all, motivation. And the second thing is what I call invocation. Trust. What do you trust? in Buddhism they say life is suffering, which is not a good beginning to a advertising campaign particularly.

But in a way, it's a very optimistic viewpoint in the sense that what they're saying is that all you have to do is be aware of [00:19:00] things, be mindful, and there will be a movement toward wholeness. Because underneath all of our stuff, there is this, basic goodness, this basic wholeness. No matter how deluded somebody is, underneath it all there is that whole wholeness, if you will.

My first meditation teacher, Suzuki Roshi, said to his students, "You're all perfect, but there's still some room for improvement here." So it's both of those things at the same time, and we don't really have time to go into this in too much detail, but when- a child is born, and even before, from the, middle of gestation to about one year old, this little being is learning to be grounded, to trust that it's safe to be here now, to be physical.

And the demon there is fear, that when you don't feel safe in the world, [00:20:00] you jump into fear. And so to the extent that you or I or anybody had illness, injury, accident, abandonment, neglect, toilet training, feeding difficulties, on and on then probably you're not completely grounded.

And particularly when the environment is challenging, like you're reading the news about the war or the next coming pandemic or whatever it might happen to be, w- people jump up into the head rather than dropping down into the root, chakra, which is the antidote to fear.

And being grounded, trusting you can get underneath the fear. There is that support, that there's this earth element, Mother Earth, trusting the mother, trusting the feminine principle, this dropping down. And we live in a society that doesn't do that very well, right? I had very loving parents, and my earliest memory is sticking a hairpin in an electrical [00:21:00] outlet.

And I was, like, really happy to do it. I f- I felt like I'd solved this complicated puzzle. I picked the thing up off the floor, and there were two holes in the wall. I thought, "Wow." I didn't have any words yet, but that goes in there, obviously. Look at how smart I am. Boom. I got the shock of my life.

And some people had not such a loving childhood, right? So then ages of six months to about two years old, getting centered, second and third chakra. movement into life, not just being here, but moving, and third chakra, beginning of ego identity, and the second chakra having the demon of guilt about what you're doing.

You shouldn't do that. You're making too much noise. You shouldn't urinate over there. You should do it this way. You shouldn't draw on the wall. You should draw on the coloring book. And the third chakra, shame about who you are. Right? You're a bad person because you're [00:22:00] taking your... I don't know what we can make something up there, right?

And, then the next thing is opening the heart, having relationships. So the, the healing paradigm talks about, first of all, motivation, and then this invocation stage. From the standpoint of the mind, watching how suffering is created, all you need to do is be mindful. From the body, getting grounded and centered.

How a tiny elderly martial arts master can defeat a huge young novice because they're not doing it. He or she is allowing the chi, the energy of the universe, to flow through and, and, be doing the, the tai chi or the qigong or whatever it might happen to be, right? And then from the ages of about four to eight, it's about not just moving into the world, but forming relationships, and , conscious relationships.

And the demon there, interestingly enough, is grief. We have a hard time [00:23:00] loving because we've done that in the past and we've been hurt.

we've, we've lost a lot. Grief, in a way, dares us to love again, right? And if you're not grounded and centered, if you're not trusting being here and trusting being able to move into the world with some integrated ego identity, it's gonna be hard to trust the vulnerability of the open heart, right?

So these things are developmental, not that we wait until we're totally open. we don't wait until we're completely grounded to be centered, and we don't have to wait to open our heart till we're in the lower belly. But we're kinda doing all these things in some mishmash, confusing way all the time.

And the book hopefully creates a, a structure that you can feel where you are and not get too lost in the back and forth of how these things interact. And then [00:24:00] after the heart is tantra, which is harder to talk about because it doesn't make too much sense till your h- heart is wide open.

But tantra is the sense that it's all sacred. Cancer, war are all f- other faces of the mother. Maybe not the most pleasant ones, of course, but, And then finally non-duality, this seventh chakra, which is of utmost importance because I believe that's what we die into. We die into that, that basic quality of pure awareness.

And to the extent we've had some practice doing that before we die, dying will be much easier. To the extent that we're firmly embedded as I'm me and I'm not you, rather than I'm me and I'm not you, but also we're one, then dying is gonna probably be pretty difficult and scary.

Karen Wyatt: That makes so much sense, and also that these five steps [00:25:00] can help us understand where we might be stuck, because you could get stuck at any one of them along the way, stuck maybe from something that happened in childhood that you've never dealt with or acknowledged.

And-

RamDev Dale Borglum: Definitely ...

Karen Wyatt: and we can't skip it. We can't skip doing that previous work a- and jump ahead, which some of us would like to. We wish we could get to non-duality easily, but we need to go through all of those steps.

RamDev Dale Borglum: it would be nice, to skip through. I do think, though, that it is possible to not take too many unnecessary detours and dead ends, right?

So the, this healing paradigm I put together is not, it's not a shortcut, but it's direct, it's a direct path that hopefully is open to people, whether they're a devotional person or a meditator or more physically oriented, way of opening.

Karen Wyatt: [00:26:00] Yeah. And it seems like once you see the map, it makes it easier to understand where you've been and where you're going in a way.

And you also include, a lot of excellent practices in the book at each one of these steps along the way that are doable and accessible to people.

RamDev Dale Borglum: And then the last part of the book is applying this, this healing paradigm to end of life issues, grief- Critical illness and caregiving, right? But the, the, the dirty secret here is that dying and caregiving aren't any different than going to a meditation retreat.

it's all just applying these basic principles to, am I eating my vegetables? Am I at the bedside of somebody who's dying? There are certainly some special attitudes and practices toward the end of life, but they're all based on [00:27:00] the same foundation of embodied mindfulness, compassionate, open heart, tantric understanding of the sacred nature of reality, right?

And it's very difficult for a lot of people, it certainly was for me in the beginning, to be around somebody who might be dying soon and not get lost in there's a dying person rather than there's somebody in a body who might be dying. That you're, you're not busy lost in the identity of a dying person or a cancer patient.

And very often people who are dying even say they're lonely because nobody's really there with them. People are lost in their fear of the g- the projection of the identity of who that person, presents to them.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's such an interesting idea, that we're no longer relating to that person as who they are and have been, but we're

now we've put this [00:28:00] label of dying on them, and it changes how we see them and how we interact with them. And I was interested in y- applying this map and this model to caregiving as well, because that's a different sort of path when we're surrendering o- our own preferences maybe day to day in order to help take care of someone else as they're on this dying path.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Very much And, one of the things I say that maybe shocks people a little bit is that my approach to caregiving is work on yourself. It's not primarily about helping somebody else. That if I'm busy... Suppose you're ill, Karen, and I'm here to help you. If I'm so busy focusing on

you that I'm missing am I grounded, am I centered, is my heart open, am I really here, then I'm not gonna [00:29:00] be a very good caregiver.

But if I'm really paying attention to what's going on in me, I will be the best caregiver because I trust my heart, I trust who I am, if I'm present in that way, right? And so in a way, caregiving is one of the most challenging circumstances in which to meditate, if you will. so it's easy to meditate- it's easier to meditate if you're in a quiet room or out in nature, you're sitting in front of your altar and there's your beloved beings, the deities in front of you.

But is it, how... Is it possible to be open like that when you're with somebody whose very being is saying, "I need help," and not lean into that, not get caught up in I'm the helper and you're the helpee, and we've got to be stuck in duality all the time in that way.

So, that finding that balance between I'm really present with what's going on in me and what is the environment asking of [00:30:00] me, rather than getting lost in the environment.

And as you talked about before, some caregivers, many caregivers get lost in the environment And I will admit that I have a big advantage because I see people through the Living Dying Project that come to me and want spiritual support. And if somebody's on the front lines in a hospital, they're dealing with anybody who comes in the door, plus they're dealing with the bureaucratic structure of the organization that they're part of.

So there's a, there, there are people there who don't want spiritual support. There are people- they are working in a structure that probably keeps them busier than they'd like to be. They don't have time to really connect with people in the way that they would like, et cetera. So fully appreciate that what I'm saying in some ways is a bit idealistic, but it's, it's, showing a direction.

It's showing a [00:31:00] possibility that can be hopefully integrated into one's lives. And I, I, do have these small groups that I facilitate, and a, a, a number of the people in them are nurses and healers on the front lines of healthcare who are finding that just by Practicing embodied mindfulness and some of the other things that, compassion and things, that they are much less burning out than they were before.

That my experience has been that a lot of spiritual seekers in the West tend to get up in their heads about things, right? Rather than, working with the embodiment piece. People want to start out on the heart or with mindfulness,

where a lot of it is, dropping down and dealing with that basic fear and anxiety and guilt and shame.

it's not [00:32:00] very romantic necessarily, but that's where we are.

Karen Wyatt: I think our society kind of supports ignoring those aspects too. Our society... what's available to us, technology, media, and entertainment, it all is designed to keep us in our heads in a way. Yeah. And, distracts us from doing that really important inner work.

RamDev Dale Borglum: The algorithm will get you.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Yes, exactly. Exactly. I remember in my hospice days, we had a patient with end-stage dementia, and his wife had been caring for him at home for a number of years. And she told me, "This is my spiritual path and I'm so grateful for it." She said, "I've learned what love really is.

I've learned how to open my heart and how to be loving by having this opportunity to take care of him." Mm. And that was unique. That was profound for me to hear that, but I hadn't heard that from very many caregivers before, and I [00:33:00] thought that was really beautiful.

RamDev Dale Borglum: she was a remarkable person. Not everybody gets there.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. That's a challenging path to, to get to that point.

RamDev Dale Borglum: what she was saying seems to come from a place of great selflessness, right? That there was a surrender there. And I've been down this path a long time, and the m- the further I go down it, or w- I don't know if there's really a direction, but it's more about receiving and surrender and than it is about doing things and accomplishing things and getting somewhere.

And, that's certainly available when you're a caregiver.

Karen Wyatt: And even as you talked about at the beginning, finding the joy, being able to hold the joy at the same time that you're holding the sorrow of the situation that you're in.

RamDev Dale Borglum: So the Living Dying Project does have all these groups and [00:34:00] speakers and courses and, one-to-one free of charge volunteers and free of charge groups that support grieving, caregiving, and, cr-

working with critical illness. People can just go to our website, livingdying.org, and there's a lot of free stuff there.

I think it... I know it is the most complete website on the internet about conscious dying and end of life issues.

Karen Wyatt: And, that's really fantastic that you're offering all, of this support at no charge.

RamDev Dale Borglum: We do a few things. There, there is a training program that costs, a very reasonable price, and we do have a speaker series where every month we try to get somebody really interesting, and I think they cost about \$25 for that.

But, and, even beyond that, we don't want anybody to stay away because of money

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, it's interesting. This is a resource that I never knew about before. It's the f- the first time I've heard about it, is [00:35:00] through getting introduced to you and your book, and I'm ... And it's so valuable, so I'm excited to be able to sh- spread the word through the podcast so more people can find it.

RamDev Dale Borglum: I'm ... It's my first time hearing about you, so when I, when-

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

RamDev Dale Borglum: I'm gonna spend some time really looking at your website. I look forward to that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Thank you. so it sounds like the Living/Dying Project is for ... It could be for healthcare providers, it could be for caregivers or a- even anyone who just has questions about dying consciously and wants to learn more?

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yes, and for anybody who has questions about living consciously and wants to learn more. So I've got a, Saturday spiritual support group that meets every other Saturday that has 1,250 people in it.

On Zoom. most people don't come in person. They get the recording because Saturday morning in California is Saturday afternoon on the East Coast, Saturday night in [00:36:00] Europe, middle of the night in Australia.

But, that doesn't have much to do at all with end of life issues. It's just, compassion and devotion and, working with the heart, working with non-duality, tantra.

Karen Wyatt: And then you mentioned to me before that you have a podcast as well?

RamDev Dale Borglum: I do. There's a podcast channel called Be Here Now Network, all one word, beherenownetwork.com.

And I have the Healing at the Edge channel, under my name RamDev Dale Borglum, which is also ... I'm still trying to figure out what my name is. I got the spiritual name in India, and it's on the cover of the book. Some of my friends call me RamDev, some call me Dale. so there's Be Here Now Network.

There are podcasts by Ram Dass, and Alan Watts, and Jack Kornfield, and Joseph Goldstein, and Sharon Salzberg, and Krishna Das, and me, [00:37:00] and on. So many people.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, that's also a nice resource to know about, which I didn't know about that, that podcast channel either, so I'm glad I'm finding out about that.

So I wanted to ask a little bit more about the book and, any thoughts that you might have, for someone who's trying to support someone else who's dying and maybe has a fear of death. so if, if we're a friend or a loved one assisting them, how can we help them with their fear of dying?

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah, that's a great question, Karen.

Thanks. the best way, in my experience, to help somebody with their fear of death is to be modeling with them your own fear... Y- working with your own fear of death, right? So I'm not an enlightened person or, in some [00:38:00] ways everybody is. There's nowhere to get, but i- in the sense that I still get anxious and a little bit wacky once in a while.

so suppose I'm with a friend who is afraid of dying. Maybe they have a critical diagnosis, maybe they don't, but they're really afraid of dying. And I'm with them, and as we're talking about things, some of my fear arises. Am I modeling that when I feel that, instead of getting lost in a, uh, s- spiral in my head, that I can be aware that, oh, there's that fear again.

I can drop down. I can be grounded. I can be aware of that. And what's interesting is almost always when fear arises, people don't feel the fear. When fear arises, people fixate on the trigger.

I'm afraid of him. I'm afraid of that. I'm afraid of this situation. And I remember the first [00:39:00] time in my life where I, just through circumstances, I was really aware what it felt like to be afraid, and it was, like, shocking because I realized I'd been afraid so many thousands of times in my life.

I was like an adult, and I'd never really felt it before. I always just jumped up in my mind. In English we say, "I am afraid." In Spanish, "Yo tengo miedo," I have fear. In Tibetan, fear is here.

So just the way we say, "I am afraid," no, you're not afraid. You're you, and there's, this passing emotion of fear that's...

It's really unpleasant, but it's just an emo- It's gonna come and it's gonna go. It's not gonna be there forever, and it's something you can be aware of, and the more you're present for it, the more it's gonna have the space to leave. The more you grab onto it and say, "Oh my God," it, tends to get stuck a little bit more, right?

So that takes practice. [00:40:00] Or from a devotional standpoint, when fear arises, fear is then overwhelming any faith that you have in what you have faith in. If you're a Buddhist, you have faith in the Triple Gem, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. If you're a Christian, you have faith in Christ. If you're a Hindu, you have faith in Hanuman or Shiva or Durga, whoever it is.

If, if you're in the 12-step program, you have faith in a higher power. If you're an agnostic, maybe you don't believe in God per se, but maybe you have faith in your own true nature. it ... The words don't really matter. So that fear arises

when we pay attention to it, what does it feel like in the body, we're trying to reduce the fear. Here, there's another way of increasing our faith. Fear has overwhelmed my [00:41:00] f- faith, but I remember how much I really do trust Christ, or I do trust the Mother, and I increase the faith over the fear amount, and then, ah, I can, trust now again.

I can relax into that.

Karen Wyatt: That makes so much sense. And that idea you mentioned at the beginning of getting grounded, being grounded and, centered when fear is

present. And I love that. I want to never say again, "I am afraid" but to say, "Fear is here."

RamDev Dale Borglum: Or even to say, "I'm feeling fear."

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes. Yeah, that makes so much sense because we're...

it's like we're identifying ourselves with the emotion, which isn't really accurate- or so incomplete, just a tiny slice of who we are at that moment.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yes.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Oh, yeah, that really makes sense. And then I'm also wondering if someone listening is thinking that they would like to take on a spiritual path or become more conscious in their own lives, [00:42:00] d- where should people start?

Do you have ideas of what should someone do who's looking at this and wanting to take the first step? Maybe they feel motivated, but they're not sure what to do.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah, that's a tough question. So first of all, it, there's kind of two ways of proceeding. One is, what is your personality type? Are you somebody who likes to just study?

Are you somebody that feels devotional? Are you somebody that likes to contemplate and go inside? if you look at Ashtanga yoga, there's the, there's, Karma yoga, there's Bhakti yoga, there's Jhana yoga, there's Jhana yoga that... So different types will follow different paths, and it's not necessarily that you're just on one path.

a lot of my path now is devotional, but it's also largely about service, of working [00:43:00] with clients and groups and things as a way of, exploring being more selfless. Not do they like me? Am I getting enough? But what is the most compassionate thing I can be doing right now? The other thing that the, the, other way we can explore this has to do with what's available in your community.

Very often, finding a group that you feel harmonious with is more important than what, what kind of group it is, what flavor it is, right? you live in the LA area, there's so many things, but a lot of people don't have a lot of choices, And a lot of stuff is on Zoom, the Living, Dying Project, a lot of it's on Zoom.

But, finding a group that really resonates with you, that you feel some sense of trust, that you feel, [00:44:00] really at home with, and that can be coming from any number of... It can... What kind of tradition, what kind of Buddhism, what kind of Hinduism or Christianity. it's all very personal But at the same time, life, as I mentioned before, is so much going out of balance in the world right now that it seems to me difficult to have a life without some kind of inner resources.

That, that for somebody who doesn't have a contemplative practice or a devotional practice, you're just adrift in this sea of confusion out there. That's tough. And, it's almost like life is saying, "Okay, it's time now to find a way to f- to become a warrior of compassion, to find some, some inner strength to deal with what is an [00:45:00] increasingly challenging time."

And the fact that we're gonna die can really inspire us to take a, a, the next step, a strong step. I wanna be here. I wanna find my motivation. I wanna find my path right now. Or even if you've been on a path for a really long time, to deepen it, to deepen a commitment, if you will. And when I say deepen commitment, something in my mind says That is too much a flavor of trying.

I've got to do something. it's, it's another task in my life rather than a, a joyfulness, something that I'm doing out of richness and abundance rather than poverty and inadequacy. That there's this gift of, practice, this gift of being with wholeness that, that is the most wonderful gift. [00:46:00]

and that it, that dying points us toward that.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, so true. and I was wondering if you... Do you recommend to people to maybe become a hospice volunteer in order to get a little bit closer to death to experience it? 'Cause some people honestly have not witnessed a death or had someone close to them die, and it...

So it feels so strange to them and...

RamDev Dale Borglum: One of my first spiritual teachers, Trungpa Rinpoche, said that until you come in contact with death, until you come in intimate contact with death, your spiritual practice will have the quality of you being a dilettante.

And however you do that, some people just gravitate toward that.

People in the community, people in the family, parents, grandparents need that support. [00:47:00] Hospices I- it get, the conversation gets slightly complicated

here. Hospices a- aren't necessarily able to let people just come in the door and match them up with dying people.

They've got their own liability issues that very often they require a very stringent training program.

Not all of them have, the same kinds of volunteer opportunities. but if you made it known to your friends and loved ones you wanted to do this work, you can be a Living Dying Project volunteer. We would ... We have 150 volunteers. Come to our website. There's a training program. I do them live in January and February, but there's a prerecorded version.

You can take it, that, that has a live component to it, and a- after you take the training, you can apply to be a [00:48:00] volunteer, and we match people up all around. I'm going to see my client in, an hour and 11 minutes. When I'm done with you, and then there's an hour in between. Not that I'm ever done with you, Kara, but

Karen Wyatt: I know what you mean.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Okay. Didn't come out quite right, did it? When we're done here, okay. Yes. That's maybe putting it a little more... yeah. but if there is a hospice, certainly call up and see if they have a volunteer program. obviously you, if you have some kind of a degree with... You're a, a nurse or a therapist or a social worker, it's a lot easier to come into contact with dying people or people who might be dying.

and hospitals sometimes have volunteer programs. old, nursing [00:49:00] homes or, skilled nursing facilities have, have sometimes programs where people come in and teach certain skills. you, you come into contact with people. Maybe you make a friend with somebody and you start visiting them. So there's certainly all kinds of possibilities.

H- hospice is just one of them.

Karen Wyatt: Just one. And that's a, a really good point because our society is not only in denial of death but also of aging, and even of illness, I think, we sometimes don't really want to spend time with someone who's very ill. that feels disturbing to people.

RamDev Dale Borglum: For sure.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah.

And, and it's really part of, once again, like the suffering of the world, the sorrow of the world, that we have to learn how to carry. We can't just push it away or reject it for all of our lives. It will keep coming back to us.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah. [00:50:00] but, it's ... I really do want to say, though, that I feel that in this day and age in which we're living, that the b- best spiritual practice, what- whatever best means to you, and I'm using that word knowingly in a very vague kind of way, is some combination of a deep inner contemplative practice combined with an outer relationship with death and dying.

And I, know people who are really doing one of them, people really doing the other one, but it's the people that are doing both that, that really seem to be flourishing.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. That totally makes sense to me. And then I would say that your book and, the five steps that you've outlined in the book, the map that you've given us, it's extremely helpful because it seems to me it, people should be able to s- have a sense of where they are on that map, what they've mastered, where they've [00:51:00] been, what life has brought them and-

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah

Karen Wyatt: where they are and maybe even what they are going to need to work through in the future.

RamDev Dale Borglum: I agree. I will confess, though, that, that I put together this grid, the, the, the five stages, the three channels, and several people, all women, have complained to me. They've said, "Dale, it's not all those right angles and straight lines."

I said, "I know that, but it's so much harder to try to draw a spiral on a piece of paper." I do want to point out that there are five stages and all these ch- at, but at the same time, it's, much messier. It's much more beautiful. It's much more ... It's more like dancing or painting than it is whoop, there's the map.

It'd be ... it is like having a map to a foreign country, but it's a kind of a fuzzy map, if you will.

Karen Wyatt: A- and you mentioned something, thinking of that spiral, [00:52:00] that we may make it all the way to non-dual or wholeness, but then we spiral all the way back down and we, something new may happen or something else develops in life.

And we start at the beginning and we ha- we have to work our way up the spiral again.

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah, and realizing that's okay, that you don't have to judge yourself for having to go back to the beginning again and again. if you feel that you should be an expert now and you shouldn't have to do that, that's gonna make life much more painful.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes, exactly. I think that's w- that's where the inevitability of death helps us recognize that we just don't have control over, life the way we wish we did or the way the ego wishes we did. Yeah. And, we have to accept whatever's coming our way.

RamDev Dale Borglum: more power to all of us to do [00:53:00] that. And in a way, I think it's an advantage to have a world out there that's challenging us, that's saying, "Hey, if you don't get it together, you're gonna have a hard time here."

You're gonna die, but you don't know when. Life is precious. Now is the time to get it together. And whether that means working with hospice or deepening your meditation practice, but it, finding that, being able to find joyfulness when there's all of these things that seem to be spinning out of control is, to me, the only game in town, if you will

Karen Wyatt: Exactly.

That's, in some ways it's the only way we survive what we're going through. Because it, it makes me feel as if what's happening in the world right now that you've elaborated upon, it's almost creates, creating more [00:54:00] urgency and pushing us more toward that motivation to grow. And that's how we should receive it, I think, is to say, "This is my..."

It's now or never. This is the time. Now is the time I need to be working on this and to grow, and do it joyfully."

RamDev Dale Borglum: Yeah, and I should have said that not only if you want to grow, come to our website, but if somebody out here listening to this is ill or

really having trouble with caregiving or you're lost in grief, we have support for you.

We have free of charge support for you. Please come to the website

Karen Wyatt: That, that's a perfect way to describe it because there are people with questions, people wondering where to go next. And so your website is going to be of great help to people. And I'm s- so glad we've been able to have this conversation to tell them about it and about your book, [00:55:00] *How to Live So You Can Die Without Fear*.

I think it's going to make a big difference to a lot of people.

RamDev Dale Borglum: I hope so. it unfortunately is called the long-awaited book by Dale. I

Karen Wyatt: Oh.

RamDev Dale Borglum: It, in the sense that I should have written this 20 years ago, but I didn't get around to it. But here it is finally,

Karen Wyatt: Here it is, and I trust the timing is perfect.

Yeah. This is exactly when we need to have it, I'll direct people once again to livingdying.org, to learn all about the things you have to offer there and your work and the book as well. And I want to thank you so much for joining me today.

RamDev Dale Borglum: it's been great to meet you, and thank you for the opportunity to talk to so many people.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes. I've thoroughly enjoyed it, and I,

RamDev Dale Borglum: You're a great interviewer. I, I really have enjoyed being with you. I'm not just saying that. I mean- Oh ... I've got a publicist now, I'm doing [00:56:00] podcasts all the time to publicize the book, and you're great.

Karen Wyatt: Oh, thank you. That means so much to me, especially because you podcast yourself, so you know what it takes to do this.

So thank you. You're we- you're welcome. I appreciate that. I'll be checking out your work, and maybe I'll, attend some of your upcoming events.

RamDev Dale Borglum: That would be lovely. Online. Thank you.

Karen Wyatt: Thank you.