

walking the path of compassionate, world-changing revolutionary: an interview with raam dev



If you aren't acquainted with him yet, Raam Dev of the appropriately named [RaamDev.com](#) is awesome. He quietly inspires me to act more responsibly, ethically, and sustainably for the greater good of the world. His [income ethics](#) has influenced how I price my offerings and my work (which is why [the letter](#) is based on the results of a reader survey on resonant pricing) and his writings always provoke me gently to rethink my assumptions. He reminds me to [stay true to my values](#) and never compromise on them.

I got the chance to interview Raam recently and, as always, he responded with his usual dose of humble wisdom. I hope you find his words similarly enlightening.

Tell us a little bit about your story. Why did you decide to let go of your possessions and travel the world? What influenced you to live the life of serving and helping others you do now?

I've always had a burning desire to know, to see and experience things with my own two eyes, to feel the earth of a foreign land underneath my feet, to smell the subtle differences in the air as I moved through it. Simply reading about the world or watching National Geographic documentaries wasn't enough.

But I didn't live the lifestyle required to satisfy those desires. I worked long hours to build a career in the IT industry, acquiring mountains of debt and making decisions that tied me down to one place. I kept putting my dreams off until tomorrow.

Then one day while I was sitting in my stuffy office, I felt something inside breathing its last breath. After being suffocated for more than a decade, my

dreams of nomadic travel were finally giving up hope. I was beginning to accept that maybe this was it, maybe the rest of my life would be spent wondering, 'what if?'

The fear of risking everything— my career, my finances, my relationships, all of it— was suddenly replaced by a much greater fear: the fear of living an average, mediocre existence and doing nothing of lasting value with my life.

It scared me so much that I wrote an email to my boss that evening informing him that I was quitting my job to travel the world. (Pro Tip: When it feels really important, pull the trigger and ask yourself questions later.)

Once I had committed to doing whatever was necessary to achieve my dreams, letting go of my possessions happened almost automatically. I wasn't going to need all that stuff in my new lifestyle, so why should I keep it?

With \$1,500 to my name and one bag on my back, I left the United States for a six-month trip to India, Vietnam, and Nepal, just two months shy of my 28th birthday.

That trip changed my life. I gained a more global, and a more human, perspective. I witnessed firsthand incredible examples of inequality (multi-million dollar skyscrapers under construction with huge slums of people living in absolute poverty just a few feet away).

I quickly recognized the privilege of being me. I recognized the wealth of knowledge and experience inside my head wasn't allowed to just sit there: it came with the responsibility to share and do something useful and meaningful with my life.

That trip helped me feel unquestionably connected to the rest of our human family and it opened my life to an everlasting sense of responsibility. But it also gave me an incredible sense of confidence: I really was capable of achieving anything I put my mind to.

One thing I'm really curious about is if you ever feel exhausted by your sheer awareness of so many of the issues in the world that need our attention. I know that when I see the devastating reality of some of the causes I'm passionate about, especially the ones that I center my work around— i.e. self-hatred, eating disorders, environmental responsibility— I sometimes feel overwhelmed.

Do you ever feel this way? How do you deal with that?

I do often feel overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the issues in the world, but what always brings me back to center is realizing that change is a team effort. These issues cannot be addressed by me only; they require huge numbers of people. Luckily, I know I'm not alone. For every one person in my life who cares about the same issues as me, there are hundreds of thousands— perhaps millions— who care about the exact same issues. Not only do they care, they're also willing and wanting to do something about it. I may not know them yet, and they may not know me, **but together we're already changing the world.**

We all create little raindrops of change, but together our raindrops create oceans.

They create culture. Each of us has the capacity for potential to act as guides

for those raindrops, creating funnels of direction by sharing ideas, inspiration, and knowledge, shaping culture by making what we care about known to the world.

When we focus on improving ourselves and our relationship to the rest of the world, our living example influences the rest of the world in tiny little ways and that's what creates movement on a global scale.

Change on that scale doesn't happen in one day; it takes years and generations. To feel discouraged that we're not capable of shifting the universe today or fixing all the world's issues in one night, that's silly. And when that feeling arises, we should just remember that we're not alone; there's an entire planet of human beings right here with us, most of whom are working towards something better.

Aside from your writing, how else do you make a difference in the world? What decisions do you make every day that embody your values?

The greatest difference we can make in the world is the difference that isn't immediately obvious. Things like upholding our character, having strong integrity, and maintaining good values; those make the greatest impact on the world. It's easy to donate money or volunteer time or even write a few inspirational words about changing the world. **But what happens when we go home? What happens when we're alone to make choices and decisions that nobody else can see?**

I like to use fitness and health as an example for this because that's where I first learned how to recognize the importance of being our own coach: We can attend the gym with our friends three days a week and make healthy food choices when a friend or family member is present, but what happens when we're alone and we need to choose between unhealthy food and healthy food?

What choices do we make when nobody else is around to bare witness to our actions?

I try to extend the philosophy of being my own coach to all areas of life: If there are dishes in the sink and nobody is around to see me clean them, do I still clean them? If someone sends me an email asking if I would like to participate in a project where I can earn some easy money but it's a project that requires compromising my values, do I participate?

The decisions I make on a daily basis are constantly judged through a lens of character, integrity, and values. **If I choose to compromise those for any reason, the person I'm harming the most is myself.**

And when I harm myself, I harm the world around me.

Do you ever feel like it's harder for you to relate to people because of your strong values?

One of my friends told me that my intensity and passion might turn off people, because they worry that I'm judging them for their actions. Usually it's with regards to actions relating to environmental harm, i.e. eating meat or using plastic. I actually feel equally—if not moreso—strongly about the rampant sexism in our culture. I think people are more unconscious to the very existence of that,

and thus don't seem to care about being sexist around me; or if they do, they recognize they're being sexist but joke about how I'd get mad. It's sometimes difficult for me to find kindred spirits as a result of my strong values, but I accept that and don't like to compromise.

When I was young, my dad would tell me short stories that were based in ancient Hindu folklore (these were my Little Red Riding Hood equivalent). They were partly from memory and partly made up, but they all had one thing in common: they all came with a moral to the story.

One of the most memorable stories he told was that of a father and son who were captured in battle and brought before the general of the opposing army. The general told the two he would spare their lives if they would give up their principles, compromise their values, and bow before him.

When the father and the son refused the general ordered a three-foot-thick wall to be built with a crevice in the middle wide enough to fit two bodies. He then ordered the father and son to stand inside the half-built wall.

Again, he asked them to give up their principles. Again they refused. The general then ordered his soldiers to start pouring cement into the wall.

When the cement was up to their neck, the general asked the father and son once again to give up their principles and compromise their values. Once again they both refused. **“You can take away our lives, but you can't take away our principles.”** And with that, the general filled the wall with cement.

That story, whether true or not, left a lasting impact on me. I've made many friends who I later disconnected from when I discovered that relating with them meant compromising my values.

Does having a no-compromise policy mean that it's more difficult to relate with some people? Absolutely. But so it should. **We may lose close friends and even make enemies by holding onto our values, but who are we if not for what we believe?**

Good answer, Raam. I feel the same way and some people might think it's not open-minded or it's too picky, but I don't think we need to force ourselves to have relationships that don't resonate with our values.

Final question: If you could spread just one message to the entire world, what would it be?

You can do anything. You can be anyone. What you choose to make of your life is in your hands.

If you choose to create a life full of watching TV, complaining about the weather, feeling sorry for yourself, and fantasizing about living someone else's life, then that's exactly the life you'll create.

On the other hand, if you want to do something amazing, if you want to leave a legacy and create a life that others will look at and say, “I wish I could do that...”, then you can. You can do anything.

Take every excuse you can think of right now and throw

it out. There are no excuses. **There are only challenges.**

And you can overcome all of those challenges just like everyone else, from the people who have shaped history to the people unknown by history who shaped their lives into something beautifully meaningful and worth living.

History is but a fading memory and eventually all will be forgotten. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by trying to do it all and be it all, be yourself.

Embrace yourself. Love yourself.

You can do anything.

*Haha, I love it—especially those last few lines—exactly what I'd say, myself!
Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview, Raam!*



Raam Dev is a thinker and explorer who seeks to understand the human perspective. He is concerned with our collective legacy and believes in living consciously and leading a lifestyle of intention. (Why do you live the way you do?)

Raam travels the world and lives out of his backpack. You may catch him crafting words in a cafe, hiking barefoot in a forest, or lost deep in thought, but you can always find his latest work on RaamDev.com.

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