

Exploring the World, Life, and Self as a Digital Nomad

By Tal Gur

Not very many people enthusiastically embrace living on a minimalist budget, at least not intentionally. Raam Dev did! But he is not like most people. At 28 years old, well established in a stable job, Raam walked away to see the world and rediscover himself. Maybe it is a combination of an adventurist heart and a mind geared to learn about whatever lies over the next hill or a far corner of the world that lead him from the confines of his cubical.

Raam grew up in rural Massachusetts in a family where education was a way of life. After early years being homeschooled by his parents, he was given responsibility for his education at age 12. By age 16, Raam was starting his first business. His pursuits of computer technology lead to his success in the business world without any formal education.

His parents were dedicated to a combination of Hinduism and Buddhism so it would make sense that Raam choose to launch his new nomadic life in India. His short term goal was to live the next six months traveling and exploring three different countries on a budget of a mere 3000 dollars (which included all transportation, housing, and food). His long term goal was a combination of learning more about himself and finding away to make a living while on the road.

Raam shared his adventures with family, friends and soon followers on his blog. India was just the beginning. He continues his nomadic travels and his writing. He combines travel stories with a passion for relinquishing materialism, seeking peace, and encouraging people to rediscover themselves and uncover their dreams.

It's with great pleasure I present this interview with my wise friend, Raam Dev. Enjoy!

1. You call yourself a digital nomad. Could you explain what your nomadic life looks like and what made you choose this lifestyle?

I have no permanent home and I travel as frequently as my intuition tells me. Sometimes I move because of an invitation from a friend and sometimes I move because finances require spending less (with the freedom to move wherever I want, I can choose to relocate to less expensive countries). All of my work is done on the computer, so I can continue working as long as I have an Internet connection.

I chose this lifestyle because it feels most harmonious with my life philosophy, which is to learn through movement and to remain open-minded. I feel the most alive when I'm in motion and maintaining the freedom to move whenever I want ensures that my growth continues.

2. In early 2010 you sold nearly all your possessions and left a cushy career in the IT industry to travel the world for six months on a monthly budget of \$250. Did you manage to stay within your budget? How has becoming a minimalist changed your life?

I arrived in India with just \$1,500 to my name, so I didn't really have a choice as to the budget. I stayed within the budget for the first few months but after picking up some freelance work online, I decided to let myself spend a little more. I believe the total amount I spent over the course of my initial six-month trip averaged out to just under \$500/month, which includes travel to and from the US.

With the experience I have now, I know that traveling in some countries, like India for example, would be easy on just \$200/month. That experience alone has changed my life. With few possessions to my name and no physical stuff holding me down, I can travel indefinitely as long as I remain frugal and keep travel a priority.

I've been living this way for almost three years now, but I remember when I first started it was challenging to avoid the old habits of 'needing' various things, like a car, or an apartment, or a bicycle. It was easy to justify having them when *I had always had them*. I had to keep reminding myself of the great freedom their absence granted me.

Now that I've become more experienced with this lifestyle, I look at things more as tools and I try to find ways that I can use those tools without actually 'possessing' them and letting them weigh

me down. For example, I use my feet and public transportation as much as possible, but if I need, or want, to use a car for an entire week, I simply find one that I can rent for less than \$150.

3. You're living a pretty extraordinary life and I imagine most people would consider your lifestyle to be a dream come true. Do you think that anyone can become a nomadic explorer if they so desire? How about someone who already has a family and a mortgage? What is the first step one should take in order to make this transition?

Yes, anyone can live this lifestyle if they so desire, but responsibilities always come first. Some responsibilities, like your job or your mortgage, you can change. But others, like your family, you cannot.

For me, before making this transition, my biggest responsibility was my job. I was number three in a small software startup and my role was an important one that covered many crucial areas. I could've submitted a two week notice and left, but that would've been irresponsible. So instead I gave them a four-month notice and helped hire my replacements.

But even before addressing my responsibilities, I needed to decide that making this transition was the most important thing in my life. Nothing was going to change until that happened, which is why despite wanting to make this transition since I was a teenager, nothing changed until I was 27.

But what if you have responsibilities that you cannot change? In that case your next step is negotiation. How can a compromise be met? I couldn't change my responsibility to support myself, so I had to negotiate. When I decided saving money to travel was more important than the freedom of owning a car, or having my own apartment, I began using more public transit and being more open to living with roommates.

So the first step to making such a transition is deciding that such a transition is important enough to start addressing your responsibilities. Then you need to address your responsibilities in order of importance and see if you can negotiate the ones that you cannot change.

4. As a nomadic explorer myself for the last 3-4 years, I really love how long term travelling allows me to broaden my perspectives and grow as an individual, but I do miss some aspects of stability and structure from time to time (e.g. , training for a triathlon, hosting friends in my backyard, etc).. Is there anything you miss

about your previous life? Do you ever get lonely on the road ? How do you deal with the fact that most of your relationships are long distance?

There is nothing I miss about my previous life, except maybe what you said about some aspects of being in one place. As a writer, I do find that some level of routine is necessary for focus and depth. And the same goes for exercise: I'm currently training for an ultramarathon and the lack of routine in my life makes creating exercise routines difficult.

However, I take these challenges as exactly that: challenges. I'm still new at this and I'm still learning a lot about myself and about how I create and grow. My travel style is slow and I favor staying in one spot for at least a month before moving on to the next. But it's really when I am traveling and physically moving from one spot to the next, when I'm looking out the window on the bus, sitting on a train, or flying through the air, that I feel myself growing the most.

I'm an introvert who recharges with silence and solitude.

Loneliness has never been an issue for me, even when I wasn't traveling. The Internet provides me with so much connection to others and I feel satisfied interacting, sharing stories, and having deep conversations with the few people that I do meet along my travels.

I know that my focus right now is on personal growth and on developing the relationship I have with myself. Three years ago I decided to take full responsibility for my life and now, through introspection, writing, and traveling, I'm exploring what that means and what I'm going to do with this newfound freedom.

5. Any idea how much longer you want to continue living as a nomadic explorer? Is it only a phase in your life? Do you think you'll eventually settle down (e.g. house, wife, kids, cute little bowls on the kitchen shelf..)?

I'm an explorer. That won't change. And aside from the occasional desire to stay somewhere for a few months, I have no desire to "settle down", now or anytime in the foreseeable future. However, it would be ignorant to claim that I know what the future holds, so all I can say is that I'm committed to exploring and remaining open-minded.

6. What aspects of long-term nomadic travel do you love the most? What do you find most challenging about your nomadic lifestyle?

When I was a little boy, I loved exploring my one-acre backyard. I turned over every rock, even the gigantic ones, to explore the world of bugs underneath. I climbed trees, waded through

streams, and roamed around trailblazing through the bushes.

What I love most about this nomadic lifestyle is that now, as an adult, the entire world feels like my backyard. There is no place outside my reach if I simply put it high enough on my list. (I really don't have a list, but that's not the point.)

When you're a little boy, however, you have parents who tell you when it's time to eat, when it's time to study, and when it's time to sleep. You can let loose and go wild because you have someone else keeping you in check and creating a routine that ensures your responsibilities are met.

The most challenging aspect of this nomadic lifestyle has been, at least so far, finding a balance or a harmonious blend between responsibilities and playtime.

However, actually needing to take responsibility for finding that harmony — as opposed to just showing up for work every day at 9am — has been such an adventure that I find myself not wanting to 'figure it out'. Adventures can't be 'figured out'.

7. You mentioned, in relation to your early travels, that instead of discovering yourself, you discovered an entire planet that needed your help. Can you elaborate further how this discovery has

influenced your life?

I've always been a helpful and empathic person — even when I was a little boy, I donated a portion of my allowance to another child in South America to help with his education — but I was very me-focused. When I thought about my life in terms of career, lifestyle, and work, it was always about what felt was best for 'me'.

I had known about world poverty and seen photos and videos of people in terribly distressed areas, but after coming face-to-face with the contrast in India — the glass skyscrapers and slums sitting side-by-side, the little kids and mothers holding babies begging for food while a Mercedes Benz drove past — it brought an entirely new perspective and reality to my life.

I felt a shift happen inside, a shift in priorities. Suddenly everything was less about 'me' and more about 'us' and now when I think about my career, my lifestyle, or my work, I'm thinking about how they're affecting the bigger picture, the rest of humanity.

What affect will my work have on the world over the long-term?
How do my lifestyle choices impact the rest of the world population?

I'm certainly still me-focused, but now it feels balanced by a heavy dose of 'us' and my focus no longer feels one-sided. I believe it's important to recognize and pursue our passions, to chase our dreams, and to follow our hearts. We don't help anyone by neglecting our self because changing the world starts with changing ourselves.

8. Two of your biggest passions in life are nature and technology. How do you combine the two? It's seems hard to connect with nature when you're in front of a laptop screen. Do you just split your time between the two passions?

I'm still struggling to combine the two and I'm experimenting with what works and what doesn't. Right now, I mostly try to split my time between the two, but even when I'm inside working I need to be near a window where I can see the sky. As I type this, I'm sitting inside at a dining table, but I'm occasionally glancing up to look through a big window that overlooks a peaceful green and blue ocean bay, with rolling hills in the distance.

Searching for a balance between nature and technology has led me to spend less time at the computer by focusing what I do and being more purposeful with my time. When I find myself loitering on my computer, idling searching for something to do, that's when I get up and go outside.

Computers create this source of endless activity, so it's important to recognize when we're doing something useful and when we're just wasting time. Computers also only activate two of our five senses, whereas nature activates all of them and pulls us back to the present moment.

I think that's why I need to see the sky, even when I'm working inside: those occasional glances out the window are reconnecting me with the present.

9. I noticed that you have been blogging since 2002. What or who prompted you to start a blog and share your journey with others?

I've been writing since I could read. I did all of my writing on a computer, even as a child, so when the Internet came around it only made sense to put my writing online to share it with others. It was also a practical way of saving my writing to central place, a place where it would be safe if my computer crashed.

During my tech career, I would write and publish solutions to problems that I came across, primarily as a reference for myself but also because I knew there was a chance someone else in the world might be searching for the solution to a similar problem.

To my surprise, lots of people found my tech posts through Google and sent me messages thanking me for publishing them. Over time, I began to see the value of publishing and sharing things online. When people started emailing me to say that something personal and reflective I shared had changed their life, I began to recognize the power of publishing online.

So there really wasn't anything or anyone that prompted me to start publishing online other than my desire to share what I had created with others.

10. Unlike many writers, you don't seem to have a specific "audience" so to speak; you said you "write for human beings". Do you think this is one of the reasons your blog is so popular? How did you manage to build a thriving community around your site?

I've always written about things that interested me, or things that I found somehow added value to my life. As such, I've never written for a specific "audience".

When I was heavily involved with technology, most of what I wrote and published was about technology. However, now that I'm more focused on personal development, lifestyle, and other topics that are applicable to a wider audience, the spectrum of people who are interested in my writing has grown as well.

More than anything though, I would attribute the growth of my audience to the growth of me as a human being. The more I learned about myself, the more I wrote and shared what I learned.

I think there's also something about my personal work ethic, about the time and attention that goes into what I create and share. I don't write for the sake of writing and I don't publish for the sake of publishing. I only do both when I actually feel that have something that needs to be shared. Basically, I don't have an agenda.

I love writing. I love the craft of writing. But I also loving sharing and creating nuggets of words that transfer ideas and knowledge with as little resistance as possible. It's a passion.

For the first eight years of publishing online, I had maybe 30 readers. But that didn't matter because I wasn't doing it for the numbers. I did it because I loved it. And I still write and publish, and always will write and publish, because I genuinely love the craft of writing and the potential that publishing creates.

When you have a passion for something, people will be attracted to that passion. Passion is its own advertising. The growth of my audience, I feel, has largely to do with my embracing the passions in my life.

11. How did you build your personal network? Would you say that networking was crucial to your online success?

I've never thought of anything I do as "networking", but rather as simply making friends and getting to know people. Networking to me implies an agenda, an ulterior motive for getting to know someone. I'm genuinely fascinated by people and I'm an avid people-watcher. I find that learning about others helps me learn more about myself.

I take that sense of curiosity with me online and I connect with people simply because they are other human beings. It doesn't matter to me if they are more or less likely to buy something or if they might know someone who has access to a bigger audience than mine.

When I reply to comments or emails, I do so as if I was sitting right there with the person. The same way I'm present when I'm talking to someone face-to-face, I aim to be present when I'm connecting online.

I feel that this "being present" in my online communication has allowed others to feel a stronger connection with me and as a result, I feel that all of the connections I make, whether they grow

to something greater or fade out into the background, all somehow contribute to my success.

12. You dedicated your site to "the exploration of what it means to be human." Can you please explain a bit more? What does it mean to be human from your perspective?

I'm still exploring what it means to be human, so I couldn't possibly say what it means. However I do feel that exploration itself, and remaining open-minded and adaptable to change, are huge parts of what it means to be human. I also feel that creating and sharing are big parts of it.

13. You recently included a paid journal subscription at <http://raamdev.com/journal>. What would a new subscriber expect to find in your journal? Are you happy with the subscription rate so far?

The biggest difference between the Journal and the thoughts and essays that I publish freely is that the free material has percolated for quite some time. The thoughts and essays are mulled over and refined until they contain only the core idea or message that I want to get across. In the process of refining, however, I feel that a lot of the backstory and accessory material is lost.

The Journal is where I share more introspective material and more stories, the place where I ask more questions and share a bit of what's going on inside my head as I create.

I'm happy with the subscription rate.

14. How do you manage to find balance between travel, work, and blogging? What's your secret to getting things done and being productive while traveling?

I don't have a secret and I wouldn't say that I have yet found a balance. I'm always experimenting with new ways of combining travel and work. Creativity is one of those things that expresses itself in unique ways through each unique individual and as a creative it's my job to find what works for me. A big part of that is listening to yourself and understanding what affects your inner balance.

I'm currently learning how my creativity is affected by both movement and by switching between analytical and creative tasks. I've been experimenting with doing creative work in the morning and analytical work in the afternoon. I've also been experimenting with how travel and movement affects those cycles by switching

between periods of frequent movement (every few days) and more settled time (a week or more). I'll probably experiment with even longer periods of a few months when I find the right place.

I also love experimenting with productivity tools like the GTD method and others that allow me to organize tasks, but the most challenging part about implementing such tools has been finding a harmonious blend between them and my creative side, which demands freedom and spontaneity. I'm convinced there is a balance to be found that maximizes both productivity and creative output, so I will continue experimenting.

15. What motivates and encourages you as you create and explore?

Life. It's here and it's asking to be used and explored. Life is like a cake after you blow out the candles: there's nothing left to do except eat it. I'm eternally inspired by life, by nature, and by the simple fact that I exist. Creating and exploring allows me to participate in that existence.

16. Finally, what are you working on now? Where are you heading to next?

I'm working on being present, which means right now I'm working on these interview questions. But I also have a few ebook projects coming up, including a compilation of my income and expenses for the past two years. I'm continuing to evolve as a writer and to explore what it means to create and publish in a digital age.

I'm currently spending a month in Tasmania and then I'll be flying back to the United States where I'll visit family for a few weeks. Early next year I'll head off to explore another corner of this beautiful world.

Thank You

Raam Dev is a digital nomad and writer at RaamDev.com . You can also find him on twitter [@raamdev](https://twitter.com/raamdev)

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