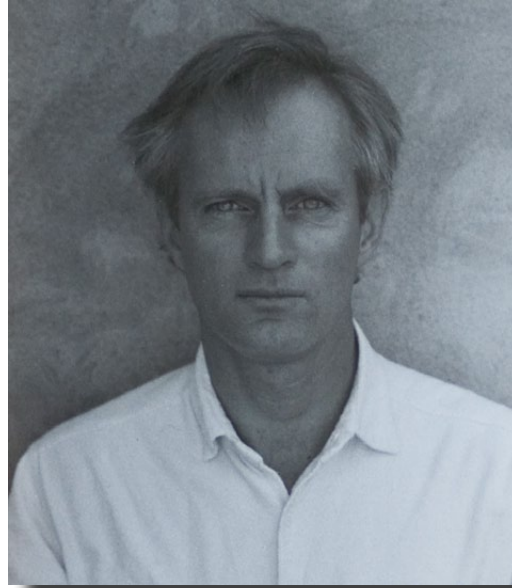


# Living with the Dying

An Interview with Dale Borglum

by Howard Jay Rubin



**A**sked about dreaming, Baba Hari Dass once responded, "Life is also a dream and death is the end of that dream. After death another dream starts." If so, how convincing a dream! Each of us has a fear, deep or shallow, of the dream's end. Everything we hold dear, everything we call ourselves, is threatened. So we usually don't think it, or assure ourselves we believe in an enduring personality or soul, or take a certain comfort in an existential view of our impermanence, futile actors on an empty stage. Most of us just don't know, and it's that uncertainty we'd most like to repress. As a culture we desensitize. The media glamorizes and over-saturates us with death — in the news, in sports, in entertainment — with a cartoon flair. Our funerals are hushed and cosmetic, high-priced consolation for the living.

Allen Ginsberg said the major revelation of his life was, "I am alive in a body that is going to die." Yet we carry on as though we were immortal. As Don Juan said to Castaneda, "That is why you are so moody and not fully alive, because you forget you are to die; you live as if you were going to live forever." For Don Juan death was an ally, inspiring us

to make each moment more alive. The need for this awareness is found in almost every spiritual tradition. It's in our deepest common sense; opening to an awareness of death opens us to a richer appreciation of life. Or, as Dale Borglum, Director of the Hanuman Foundation's Dying Center, says: "Conscious dying is really no different from conscious living. Dying brings to awareness those things that we have a difficult time with and push away... Your fear of death is almost an exact outline of where it is you are caught."

The Dying Center is part of the Hanuman Foundation's Dying Project, which for the past four years has offered lectures and workshops by the spiritual teachers Ram Dass and Stephen Levine, audio and visual tapes, books, and articles. About a year ago, they formed the Dying Center in a large house in the hills near Santa Fe, New Mexico, where dying people can come to live and be cared for in an environment "optimally designed" to explore, "Who is it that dies? What is it in each of us that is untouched by death?"

There is no charge for food, room or the services of the staff. Participants are asked to pay for their

own medical care and for either their return transportation or the disposal of their body. The center is supported entirely by donations and workshop fees. The three-person staff headed by Dale, are neither doctors nor healers, but people open-heartedly trying to work with the dying. "We're making a statement to the culture as a whole," Dale says, "that there is another way to approach death," emphasizing challenge and opportunity rather than calamity and pity. In the *Dying Project* newsletter Dale writes, "Whether it is the death of someone deeply loved or leaving behind one's own body, or being in attendance during someone's dying, the dying process is potentially the most direct and immediate opportunity for spiritual awakening of an entire lifetime."

Dale's work puts him in constant, close contact with death. He sees the reactions of the dying and those of himself and his co-workers. It's not easy work, certainly nothing for which his Ph.D. in mathematics prepared him.

Completing his doctorate in the early Seventies preceded a period of re-evaluation for Dale. He went to India and became involved in meditation and Hindu philosophy, spending six months with Neem Karoli Baba (known as Maharaji; this was Ram Dass' guru). Back in America he worked for more than ten years in different occupations, from cook to mediation teacher. Four years ago he began his work with the dying.

Dale was in Chapel Hill recently to lecture on his work and give a weekend retreat at the home of Bo and Sita Lozoff, who run the Hanuman Foundation's Prison Ashram Project. I arrived early for the interview. Over breakfast the talk turned to the Hindu tradition in India, where many people make a pilgrimage before they die to the city of Benares, thought to be the abode of Shiva, god of transformation, dissolution, and death. They believe that if someone dies in Benares, Shiva appears at the moment of death and whispers God's name in their ear. Thus liberation is attained. "The difference," Bo said, "is that in America we have to realize that everywhere is Benares."

Though Dale said he felt "talked out" after three days of lecturing, he quickly kicked into gear. His words were clear and thoughtful, his tone always light. His beliefs about the nature of dying seemed fairly set though not rigid, still open-minded enough to feel its mystery. Speaking with him I felt how little thought through were my own feelings about death, or perhaps how well thought through, how

little felt.

A week later I developed a cough and shortness of breath. One evening my breath, which had been strained, became impossible. I fought for each one, wheezing it out. As I struggled harder, all the thoughts dimmed but one, "dying." I grew scared, crying, heart pounding a sharp pain through my chest. I fought hard, and the more I fought the worse it was. I saw images of loved friends and turned to them for strength. This calmed me. I rocked back and forth with eyes closed, trying to relax and calm my rushing thoughts, silently praying. Then more fear, more tears. Slowly I stopped struggling. My breath grew freer and deeper. A half-hour had passed. I looked at my body and saw it weak, dying — though not as quickly as I had just felt, dying nonetheless. I felt the attachment to this body, these friends, this life. "Let's make it slow," I thought, "Please?" I began to feel very light and free. I woke many times that night, deeply content and thankful, a bit wonder-struck. What had happened? A moderate case of bronchitis that had gotten out of hand. Probably quite safe. Had I let go and had the medication I had taken earlier finally started working? Probably both. The mood would pass, but once more I'd been reminded.

Anyone wishing to make donations or find out more about the *Living/Dying Project* can write PO Box 357, Fairfax CA 94978 or email [info@livingdying.org](mailto:info@livingdying.org)

— Howard Jay Rubin

**SUN:** What is the difference between your center and a traditional hospice?

**BORGLUM:** At a traditional hospice the patient is seen as a physical, psychological being. With as much love and openness as possible, the physical pain, the psychological fears and confusions are dealt with. But at the same time there is an applied assumption that "you're dying and it's really a catastrophe, so let's make the best of a bad situation." There are many people working with hospices that don't have that attitude, but that's a good generalization.

At the Dying Center we're trying to make a different statement — yes, dying is something that in its human terms is a great loss, probably the greatest loss. Everything that we have collected during this life, our friends, our possessions, everyone that

we've grown close to, everything that we understand is going to be lost. There is grief and we have to deal with that in as human and open way as we can. But at the same time there is, for lack of a better word, a spiritual perspective. Even though the body dies or the personality structure dies, who you are is much vaster than that. In a very profound way, who we are does not die. Life and death are two sides of the same coin. To say that life is good and death is bad, the ultimate catastrophe, is pushing aside one whole side of the reality of who we are.

**SUN:** Let's talk about how different societies have dealt with death and how the American view fits into that.

**BORGLUM:** In most of the world's great religions, if not all, there is an understanding that the moment of death is the most important moment of one's life. And there are ways of preparing oneself so that death isn't seen as that ultimate threat. In fact, in many traditions death is not even seen as a problem, but as a natural unfolding of who we are. In our culture, because we are so materialistic, concerned with our appearance, physical well-being, accumulating money and power, we tend to take only what we can see and touch and feel as real. Because of that death becomes the enemy.

Let me give you an example. Four years ago I was a meditation teacher, traveling around the country giving workshops, I would get on a plane and a gentleman beside me, a businessman with a three-piece suit, would ask, "Where are you going?" I'd answer that I was going to such-and-such a place to teach meditation. He'd lean away from me and say, "Oh, that's very nice," and that would be the end of the conversation. Now I get on a plane, the same fellow sits down, he's a little bit older, so am I, and he says, "Where are you going?" I say, "I'm

going to such-and-such a place to teach conscious living and dying." He looks at me and says, "It's just amazing. A few days ago I found out that my wife has cancer," or "My mother has just died," or "My son committed suicide a few years ago and I can't really deal with it." By the end of the trip we're intimate friends. Yet I'm talking about exactly the same things as when I was a meditation teacher. Because our culture is so preoccupied with the physical, talking about conscious dying is one of the most direct ways of talking about spiritual truths. In those terms people are open to it. Perhaps this man on the airplane doesn't want me to talk about God, that's too gauche, or he doesn't want to hear about meditation because it doesn't fit into his world view. But when I'm talking about death I'm talking about something that has touched most people.

There isn't much information readily available

about how the dying process doesn't need to be pushed away or feared. Partly what we're doing at the Dying Center is, of course, taking care of dying people. But just as important a part of our work is that we're making a statement to the culture as a whole that there is another way to approach death. It is my belief that we



Dying Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, home to staff and guests who come for support in their journey..

have come to this planet in some sense like coming to a spiritual school, to understand more fully who it is that lives and who is that dies. With that perspective, the dying process can be one of the most productive periods of one's life. The very deepest issues are impossible to avoid then. They're forced upon the person who is dying and even upon those who are close to the one who is dying.

**SUN:** How have your ideas about death changed as a result of your work?

**BORGLUM:** I remember the first person I counseled, a friend of Stephen Levine. As I was driving over, I was very tense. What was I going to say? How could I really be there for this person who

was dying? When I got there, Stephen was at the bedside joking, laughing, seemingly unconcerned that this man was dying. His body was just a mess. It shocked me to see that Stephen could be so light about the whole thing. As time has gone on, I've seen myself doing the same thing. Now when I come to be with a person who is dying, I don't see them as someone who is dying, or at least try not to. I see them as a person who is in a body that's dying. There's a big difference there, though at times it's subtle.

There was one time when I was very sick. I almost died from hepatitis. My friends came by to see me, saying, "Poor Dale. Isn't this a shame?" Everybody was treating me with such pity. To be sure, my body felt really crummy. But still I felt like me, and everyone was treating me as just the disease. I realized that the reaction of everyone else was making it harder for me to let go of my identification with the illness.

I see more and more that when I'm with a "dying person" I don't have to buy into the melodrama of "someone is dying." It's tricky because I still want to keep my heart open. If I have to push away the suffering, the physical pain, the fearfulness or confusion of this person, then I'm losing my perspective. That's a fine balance you have to keep, staying open to the human predicament and at the same time understanding that there is a part of us that is totally untouched by dying.

**SUN:** When someone comes to you with views similar to your own, what happens to their spiritual equanimity when faced with the physical pain of dying?

**BORGLUM:** It varies with each individual. Often, younger people who have done some spiritual work on themselves and think of themselves as spiritual have a hard time with the dying process. They have done certain spiritual practices, they've meditated, they've prayed, whatever, and feel that they should be able to heal themselves, or deal with the pain, or whatever "shoulds" they may have. It may or may not be the case that healing of the physical body is possible. It may truly be the time to die. When this starts to become apparent they often have a lot of resistance. A lot of our work is not trying to push people beyond the resistance but creating an environment in which it can be seen that the resistance is not necessary. In fact, the optimum mind-state that allows for healing of the entire being. I don't see a dichotomy between

healing and dying. People certainly don't have to promise to die to come to our center. In fact, almost everyone who comes is still actively pursuing their healing. The healing that we are working with is the healing of the entire being. The dying we are working with isn't predicated upon death of the body. It's the death of separateness, death into the next moment, death into life. A lot of people are threatened by the name "Dying Center." Why would anyone want to go there? We chose that name on purpose to elicit that reaction from people.

**SUN:** Helping another to die has always been a priestly function. Do you see yourself in that role?

**BORGLUM:** Dirty question. (Laughs.) An acquaintance of mine, Charlie Garfield, did his Ph.D. thesis on the fear of dying. He developed a psychological measure of how afraid to die certain groups of people were. He studied ministers, doctors, people who had done a significant amount of meditation, and people who had done a significant amount of psychedelic drugs. He found that doctors and ministers were more afraid to die than the other groups. Now, I'm not advocating that everybody rush out and take drugs to help with their fear of dying, but I think his study points out that just studying to be a priest or a rabbi or going through medical school does not deal with one's fear of dying. But doing something like meditating — which is in a certain sense learning to die into the moment — or even taking a strong drug that forces you to do that, is in some sense a preparation for dying. To the extent that one is fully alive, death is just another moment. Meditation is a way of looking at what is keeping us from being fully alive. The reason I am interested in dying is not, I hope, that I have a morbid personality, but rather that to the extent that I am identified with what it is in me that suffers — my body, my personality — to that extent I'm going to be afraid of dying. One's fear of death is almost an exact outline of where it is you are caught, where you feel separate. I'm more interested in consciousness than in physical death, but death is an arrow pointing to what keeps me from being able to fully meet another human being. What is it now, in this moment, that keeps me in the role in which you're interviewing me? There's two of us here, separated. What about that part of me that's afraid to die into this moment to the point where these roles are still here but we're playing it so, so lightly? Often, being around dying people who are able, through the process of their disease, to let go of a lot of these

deep clings, I see them becoming my teachers. They're so light they almost float away. There's not a feeling of "I am dying," or "I am sick." It's just, "Here we are."

**SUN:** Do you still fear death?

**BORGLUM:** I don't feel much fear of death intellectually. I have a world-view that says death is O.K. And it isn't even a view, it's something I know. It's part of me. Nevertheless, the last time I was almost in a car accident I was really frightened. So, I feel that if I had a chance to prepare — if someone told me I had two hours before the bomb was to drop, or if I had a long-term cancer — I could, through meditating or my spiritual practices, get it together. But who knows whether I will have that luxury.

**SUN:** How do you work with your own fear of death?

**BORGLUM:** I don't so much work with my fear of death as I work with the smaller fears that come up daily — being rejected by other human beings, wanting people to love me, being afraid that there's not enough money in the bank. Mother Theresa talks about working with the little things. Each of these is a step in learning to let go.

**SUN:** If I knew I were soon to die, why might I want to go to your center?

**BORGLUM:** Let's assume that you are a person whose life is predicated upon finding the truth, on getting clearer, on coming into union with God, and that either you haven't got a family that will take care of you, or you feel as though you've worked things through with your family to the point where you don't have to be there anymore, or maybe just that your family is pulling you back because of their own fears of your dying. Then you might consider coming to the Dying Center. It's fine with us if you heal yourself and walk out the door. It's fine with us if you die. Our work is to support you, nurse you, feed you, take care of you in all the more obvious ways. Sometimes there's counseling or we'll meditate together, or do massage or body-work, or take you outside so you can sit by the trees.

When I choose people to be on the staff of the Dying Center, I'm not interested in who has a lot

of nursing skills or has been around dying people. Those skills can be learned rather quickly. I'm looking for people who are conscious, compassionate human beings who aren't threatened by death. If you go to almost any hospital in the country, or stay home with your family, there are probably going to



Patient Devatirth Greenberg in center with his wife Lyn Prashant and Dale.

be people around you very threatened by the fact that you are in physical pain and suffering, that you are dying. Most people in this culture live their lives based on a strategy of avoiding pain and suffering and increasing pleasure. If your strategy is to avoid suffering and I'm dying in front of you, in a lot of physical pain and emotional confusion, it's going to be difficult for you to stay open to that. So, we're trying to create an environment where, as much as possible, we aren't pushing or pulling or projecting our fears and desires on to people. At another level, you might want to come to the Dying Center because it is a very beautiful place out in the country. It doesn't cost a penny to stay there. We just ask that patients have the resources to take care of their own medical care and be able to fly home after their stay, or dispose of their remains, whatever the case may be.

**SUN:** If I arrived there in great pain, what type of treatment or practice might you recommend?

**BORGLUM:** When someone comes to the center, either they've already got their own doctor or we bring them to one of the more compassionate doctors in the Santa Fe area. They have a complete medical examination, then the doctor and the pa-

tient and I sit down and talk about what is needed for their care. It may very well be that a patient comes already taking one kind of pain-relieving medication or that the doctor feels that is something the patient should do. Our feeling at the center is that it would be beneficial for the patient to be as conscious as possible through the process, so that he or she will be available for the teachings that are almost sure to come. Consequently we encourage people to not overly medicate themselves. There are pain meditations we use where, in many cases, people can deal with their pain, and withdraw from or significantly reduce the amount of medication that they are taking. These meditations help one to open to the pain, to soften around the pain, not to see the pain as an enemy. To the extent that one doesn't have to resist the pain, it often stops being the problem it once was.

**SUN:** Have people come to die at the center?

**BORGLUM:** Yes.

**SUN:** Would you share some of those stories?

**BORGLUM:** First of all, almost everybody who has come to the center has come not to die but to explore their healing, to be around loving people who would take care of them. In some cases people's bodies have gotten better and they've left, in other cases their bodies have deteriorated and they have died. In almost every case there has been a real opening to what it is that's going on. We've seen a lot of the resistance and denial of what is happening worked through. This comes partly from the work we do, and partly from the disease progressing to the point where it is not longer possible to say, "This is not happening."

One man who came to the center was half American Indian and half Hispanic from northern New Mexico. He was dying of cancer. As a younger man, he had been a shepherd high in the mountains, where he'd go for long periods without seeing another human being. He didn't speak very good English, and I didn't speak very good Spanish. He didn't want to know about healing meditations or about letting go. These things, in other forms, were already part of his life. Most of our work together consisted of sitting in front of the fireplace, occasionally throwing in a log. Usually just sitting there quietly, I learned more from that man than from any of those with whom I've been able to do pain meditations and talk with about opening up. He was a very gentle, loving human being.

What the Dying Center is about is compassion. It isn't always the case, however, that when helping someone to deal with his or her own suffering, one has to be nice. When I am open enough, when I am clear enough that I can really trust my own heart, sometimes I see that what is needed in the situation is possibly ignoring someone for awhile, or saying no to him. That's not always easy. Here's a person dying, in pain. And to the extent that this person is threatened by their disease, to the extent that he's

still identifying with his separateness, he will probably try to get me to buy into his melodrama, to feel some pity for him. A lot of my work is to just stay as clear as I can, so I can be there, available and loving, but at the same time have a penetrating enough awareness that I don't buy into the superficial sentimentality of the situation. And death, of course,

is the ultimate melodrama. Any place where you're scared or arrogant or buying into your desires at all is going to be magnified in the dying process.



**Front row:** Diane Haug, Associate Director of Center; Linda Erle, Center staff nurse; nurse from Hospice of Santa Fe  
**Second row:** patient and her husband  
**Third row:** son of patient and Dale; **Top:** volunteer at Center

**SUN:** How about your own experience working at the Dying Center?

**BORGLUM:** Before we opened the Center, I had pictured working with dying people as being rather dramatic and exciting. I found that really isn't the case. There are those moments of crystal purity and breath-taking love, but often it's just a day-to-day job, changing bed-pans, going to the drugstore, cleaning up the bodily fluids that are all over the place, sitting at someone's bedside holding their hand for hours on end, getting up in the middle of the night to go to someone's bedside who's rung the bell and by the time I get there they can't even remember what they wanted. I see through the mirror of this work the ways I am self-centered. It's an environment where over and over I'm called upon to take care of people who can't take care of themselves. There was a woman with us who was so weak for the days before she died who couldn't even sip liquid through a straw, so we took a syringe and put water directly into her mouth. My life during those days was based upon giving her water and turning her over and rubbing her body, just taking care of another human being. I'm sure a mother would know more than I knew about it before I got into this kind of work. Repeatedly I find myself thinking, "Now is the time I should be meditating," or, "Now is the time I should be sleeping," but that's just not available to me at the point.

Let me read a quote from Mother Theresa of Calcutta. It is the direction in which we're trying to go:

*"We feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but if that drop were not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. I do not agree with the big way of doing things. To us what matters is an individual. To get to love the person we must come in close contact with him. If we wait until we get the numbers then we will become lost in the numbers and we will never be able to show that love and respect for the person. I believe in person to person. Every person is Christ for me, and since there's only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment."*

That points out an interesting part of our work. We have room at the center for two or three people

at a time. It's really just my home, our home. It's not anything that's commercial. So we're not saving the world by helping a lot of people, yet we're doing something purely, making the statement that there is an open and compassionate and yet fully human and conscious way to die. I can't think of a place that could better show me the places in myself that aren't open, loving and available. When I talk to you and my heart opens and closes a bit, that's O.K., because this is a social interaction and that's what's going on. But if you were dying, it would be so painful. It rips my heart open to be with a person who is dying and not be available, not fully meeting who they are. Now, that's beginning to carry over into the rest of my life. Here we are, we're both dying. Who knows when and where and why. It's like Don Juan talking about keeping death over your left shoulder as an adviser, not in some morbid way but to make this moment fully alive. The inevitability of death, rather than being a problem or a fear, becomes a source of inspiration. This moment is precious. Don Juan also said, "The ordinary man takes everything as a blessing or a curse. The warrior takes everything as a challenge." If the ordinary person gets a cancer diagnosis from his doctor he probably takes it as a curse, but again and again we've seen cases where someone has a terminal diagnosis and they have a remission. And that person says, "You know, I'm not as alive as I was when I thought I was going to die soon." So was that cancer diagnosis a blessing or a curse? Or is there a way of living that goes beyond the blessing and curse? A way that sees each moment as a challenge toward our becoming more fully alive? If in fact one is able to come to that way of living, then dying can be a very rich period of one's life.

**SUN:** Aldous Huxley took psychedelics on his death-bed. Ghandi chanted the name of God. What does conscious dying mean to you.

**BORGLUM:** That's a good question. Conscious dying is really no different than conscious living. The reason we're talking about conscious dying as a separate concept is that dying brings to awareness those things that we have had a difficult time with and pushed away. To me conscious dying just means having a wide open heart at the moment of death. It isn't that I have to be a saint or have any model of who I'm supposed to be in that moment. To be able to just be fully there, with my body, with my mind, with my spiritual being. A feeling of "Ah, yes. This moment too."

**SUN:** Do the people who come to the center have similar beliefs? Are they the type of people you expected?

**BORGLUM:** There have been many different kinds of people. Before we started I had a picture of who would come. It was of a younger person with cancer who had been doing a lot of deep inner work. We would meditate together during their dying process. As they died the angels would be blowing their trumpets and everyone would be singing joyously. It would be a celebration of life. In fact, that has been the case only occasionally. Many people who have come have been so-called ordinary people, like the old man I told you about. A lady came from Taos, New Mexico, who was an artist. She was an atheist. She had spent a lot of time alone in the desert with her art. She was a very open and loving human being. Even though we didn't share a common belief system about life and death, beneath the beliefs there was a place where could deeply meet. There have been Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, and many others. I'm grateful for that. If everyone was what you'd call a New Age person, about my own age, it would not bring the same richness. There have been people from 3 years old to their middle 70's. This has forced us to become very flexible. In fact, the need for flexibility — learning to be with people in the way that they need — has been one of the greatest teachings. I'm learning that my idea of a conscious death is only my idea, and that I have to keep expanding my conceptual framework to allow each of these people to die their own conscious death.

**SUN:** How do you decide who comes to the center?

**BORGLUM:** The only qualification for coming to the Dying Center is a willingness to live in an environment where the priority is truth. It turns out that very quickly extended not only to the patients but to the staff. All of us are under exactly the same ground rules — here we are living together and we have to deal with being here fully. Not in some confrontational way like an encounter group. But it's clear when someone is dying that there isn't the time to play the social games. There isn't time to keep waiting for the right moment. This is the right moment. Often the staff has had the hardest time. In a very real sense all of us are dying and I'm having a harder time differentiating between a dying person and another person on the staff. We're all

playing the same game — getting straight, finding the truth, coming into God together in this particular environment, in some sense a family. Staff members, including myself, are often going through transformations just as directly and abruptly as the patients who are dying. I have to be in love with all the people on the staff. It's impossible to love just the patients and treat the staff just as staff. It's impossible to turn it off and on.

**SUN:** What other special challenges does your work entail?

**BORGLUM:** Thomas Merton said, "Prayer and love are learned in the hour when prayer becomes impossible and the heart turns to stone." We've all had experiences in which our heart has been wide open — the perfect sunset, looking into the eyes of a loved one, that magical moment. Yet suppose we're sick and in pain. Is it also possible in that moment for the heart to stay wide open and not turn to stone? As long as we are dependent on the external environment for our openness, we're going to have to protect ourselves. We're going to have to monitor each experience and see if it's going to lead us in the direction we perceive as beneficial. As the quote from Merton suggests, true love that is not dependent on the environment is going to be learned in those difficult times. That's why death and suffering are interesting. There are two kinds of suffering, the kind that leads to more suffering — getting caught and strengthening the conditioned response to push it away — of the kind of suffering which brings an end to suffering, which involves bringing an awareness to the suffering. Bob Dylan said, "What price do we have to pay to get out of going through all these things twice?" The price is full attention, attention of the entire being, not just looking at it with the mind, but really being there. When the more primal emotions like jealousy, fear, lust, and anger arise it's difficult to stay open to them. And yet those are the places where we can really begin to learn. When I was a meditation teacher people would say to me, "I had a good meditation," or "I had a bad meditation," a good meditation being one in which there was a lot of concentration, calmness. It was pleasurable. It was nice. A bad meditation was one in which there was agitation or anxiety. But it may very well be that the so-called bad meditation was the one with the real lessons. When one has this attitude he becomes invulnerable in a sense. Suffering will still be there but it isn't something that you have to push away.

When it is there, that is where the teaching lies. With that attitude, a very deep balance can come into being, where we're not busy accepting or rejecting what we experience, we're just there with what arises.

In fact, a deeper way of looking at these questions is to ask whether physical reality is real. Are we in fact these bodies? Are these bodies, which get sick, get old and die really who we are? Usually we just assume that's what life is. The solidness of it seems to prove the reality of it. I have begun to see in my own life that coming into an intimate relationship with death cuts through a lot of the dilettantish quality in my spiritual practice. As long as I wasn't coming into some close relationship with death, then tomorrow was always soon enough. When you say death is not real and who you really are doesn't die, it is easy to misinterpret that and believe that you have plenty of time. Death is completely safe so I have nothing to worry about, and yet this is the only moment when awakening can take place. Sure we can wait as long as we want, but there may not be another moment when our bodies are strong enough and the mind is clear enough to do the work that is needed. So in the investigation of what is real we see that in some sense death is not real, and yet in another sense we have to use it as an inspiration to practice in this moment — both at the same time.

**SUN:** Do you feel that you could work with somebody close to you, such as a member of your family?

**BORGLUM:** I've thought about that. My parents are in their seventies. They're both very healthy. I often tell people that if they ever have the chance to be around a close family member who is dying, even if it means taking a leave from your job or arranging for someone to take care of your kids, try to do it. It may be one of the greatest blessings of your life at that time. If either my parents or my brother or any of my close friends were dying, and it is possible for them to come to the center, I'd love for them to come. It might be a very different process for me, but at the same time, when someone is at the Dying Center for two months and then they die, I have gotten very close to them. It's like I'm living in a world where my roommate is always dying.

**SUN:** Lets talk about your background, especially how it relates to the work you're doing.

**BORGLUM:** I have a Ph.D. in mathematical sta-

tistics from Stanford University which I got at the beginning of the 1970's, at a time when a lot of us were reappraising what our lives were about. I had an intuitive feeling that I didn't want to be a scientist the rest of my life. I was co-director of the Esalen at Stanford program through which I met people like Ram Dass, Laura Huxley, and others who aren't so well known, who showed me that there are other possibilities. When I got my doctorate, I went off the India, became deeply involved in meditation. I spent six months with Maharaji — Neem Karoli Baba — and through these experiences realized that my life was about coming into the truth. Since returning from India I have had lots of different kinds of jobs, everything from a natural foods cook to a manager of a musical group to being a meditation teacher in convalescent hospitals. I had been in college 10 years before I went to India, and the 10 years after I came back was like another training program in another school. Then in the early Eighties, actually about three or four years ago, I started doing work with dying people. I feel that right now I'm doing something that challenges me as fully and directly as anything I can think of. I don't know if it's my life work, but I certainly know it's a very deeply rewarding experience and it's opening my heart.

**SUN:** What were your guides through your second training period?

**BORGLUM:** I had a very deep sense that I was supposed to be taking this course. I had no one to tell me where to go or what to do, except what I was feeling inside. It was frustrating because I didn't know what was leading me. I had to trust very deep and often vague messages. In fact, during one of those periods I was doing nothing at all, learning that was O.K., just being there. That was the most difficult period for me. I'm very goal-oriented, an over-achiever in some ways. To be in a situation where I couldn't find a place to put all my energy and have to relax — do some meditating, walk on the beach, have a job that was just enough to keep me going — that was very productive and very frightening at the same time.

Very few of us have the luxury of having a spiritual teacher to tell us what to do. We have to find those messages ourselves from our own lives and they are sometimes conflicting. So, I find that it's almost a necessity to have some kind of inner practice to help us go beyond the problematic, conceptual level. When I look at my life rationally I can

see the pros and cons of the different directions I can go. It's all so intertwined and complicated that it becomes impossible to understand it fully enough to choose what I should do next. So I gather all the pertinent information and let go of it, let go of the rational mind. With a deep connection through Christ or in meditation I get quiet enough so that I'm not even finding the answers but it just appears. I know. Letting myself be trusting enough to go beyond the problematic level, again and again dying into the moment. Of course, again and again I also buy into my own neurosis. It's not a very clear path, but by having a practice I can see more easily the ways I'm getting caught and I don't have to buy into them as being completely solid. It isn't that just because I have an inner practice I'm going to know what to do all of the time, but I keep learning from my mistakes — if in fact there is such a thing as a mistake — seeing the places where I'm bumping up against myself or contracting or pushing things away. We all have our own blind spots.

**SUN:** How do you react when you come upon your own blind spots?

**BORGLUM:** It depends on how deep it is. If it's the place where I'm still really threatened I'm going to retreat from it again and again. If it's just at that edge of what I'm able to deal with then that's my work as the time.

**SUN:** Where does Maharaji fit into the Dying Center work?

**BORGLUM:** It's Maharaji's Dying Center. I'm almost reluctant to talk about him because I don't really think of him as a being whom I spent time with in India and have fond memories of. Instead he is, even though he is dead, a statement of the true possibility. Ramana Maharshi said, "A guru's work is done in one second." Once the disciple sees that possibility he or she has to do the rest of the work himself. I was blessed to spend some time with a being who was as far as I can tell a perfect statement of love. Because of that meeting I have some bottom line in my life. That love is always there. I forget it again and again. I buy into my neurosis. I buy into "I'd like to change the world." I buy into "I want people to love me." And yet, in that one moment of touching that love completely, my life has radically changed. In some way I am crazy for that love. Sure I go in this direction and that direction away from it, but if I go far enough away from that love something rips a little deep inside and I say,

"Oh right," and I come back to that place. In some sense the relationship with Maharaji becomes internalized, one of mutuality. Not that I'm as vast as he is, but he's not something outside that I have to become or reach toward or feel in any sense inferior to. Christ, Maharaji, Buddha. They're all exactly the same. I just happened to meet one of them.

In speaking of my relationship with him people sometimes get jealous or say, "Oh, he's got a guru" in a patronizing way. It doesn't feel like that anymore. It feels like it is something that's available to every one of us. In this moment we can go to that love fully. It's right now available. Maharaji is right here. In the Dying Center, seeing that death is right there makes me remember that love is real. When people are dying they don't talk about what they've accomplished in their life, or what things were like back in the 1930's. They talk about the quality of love. Often they become increasingly a statement of that love. To the extent that I'm around someone who is dying and I can see that human being as a manifestation of Christ (pause)... It's like in the Bible, where Christ says, "For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came unto me." To the extent that I can see that dying person in front of me as Christ or Maharaji then the pain is transformed. To the extent that I'm saying "Oh, here is a dying person. I've got to help them. I've got to do something for them," I can still do good things but I'm still one step removed from what I really can do. Dying makes it more obvious. The same things is going on right now in our conversation. How much can we go beyond these identities which are real but yet there's that deeper level unopened. When I come back to that level I ask myself what it is that seduced me into forgetting it. It amazes me that I've forgotten. And yet we do again and again. The preciousness, the sweetness of this moment.

**SUN:** In relating to the public sometimes you're Ram Dev, sometimes you Dale...

**BORGLUM:** For this interview I'd rather be Dale. I used Ram Dev when I lived in Santa Cruz. Everyone wore this or that kind of weird clothes, and this or that kind of name. When I came out to Santa Fe to start the Dying Center, dealing with doctors, real estate agents, lawyers, it seemed to me that being the director of some place called the Dying Center was weird enough already without having an

Indian name. Even when I meet somebody called Ma Prema or some other spiritual name, there's a reaction in me. What must it be like for the guy at the lumber yard when I say, "Please send it out to Ram Dev's house." I don't need that identity anymore. It's in there. It's the same thing with talking about Maharaji. When I teach I don't talk about my spiritual name or Hanuman or Ram Dass. The work with the dying makes this inappropriate. If I were going around teaching meditation then it could be couched in those terms. But what I'm talking

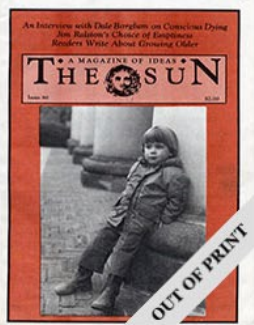
about is dying. Why unnecessarily limit who can hear what I'm saying just because I'm holding on to some kind of spiritual identity? I'd like this message to be available to people who might be offended by this spiritual name.

*This article appeared in the January, 1983, issue of The Sun. Below is a facsimile of the table of contents for that issue taken from the Sun's website.*

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