

Shrink Rap Radio #160, June 27, 2008, Drunk With Wonder
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Steve Ryals
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Susan Argyelan)

Excerpt: *In my own work with personal growth, I realized that the stories we are raised with, that the emotional traumas that we have, that we then come up with some kind of story to explain, usually involving something like “I’m wounded; therefore, I am,” that in order to truly heal out of that place, to move beyond and stop, in essence, being a victim; in other words, “I’m wounded; therefore, I act like a jerk,” “I’m wounded; therefore, I treat my wife like crap,” “I’m wounded, therefore I speed and endanger people and drink excessively,” or what have you. When we stop doing all of those things and can just kind of go, “Wow! I had these stories, and I can really appreciate how my inner kid – my little kid – can really be terrified with all this stuff. And here and now, I’m not that little kid anymore. He lives inside me, but I can just pick him up and hold him and love him and soothe him, and I don’t have to let him run the show anymore.”*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Steve Ryals. The thesis of his new book, [Drunk With Wonder: Awakening to the God Within](#), is that feelings fully felt shift. Through learning to be present to his own deep feelings, Ryals was able to let go of years of addictive behavior, including freeing himself of decades of alcohol abuse seven years ago. He attributes his current health and happiness to his direct experience that “healing takes feeling” and says healthy sharing of feelings is key to a wonder-filled life. *Drunk With Wonder: Awakening to the God Within* is the culmination of years of research and decades of personal experience. It’s been hailed as where “Conversations with God meets What the Bleep Do We Know?” Steve Ryals lives off the electrical grid in northern California, has a publishing company, was a music reviewer for years, has made and lost a million dollars, and has been studying mind/body health his entire adult life. He’s very knowledgeable about the interface between science and philosophy/religion, and his book is a compendium of the literature to date with an extensive bibliography combined with his own story of going from homeless and Methedrine-addicted to graduating from U.C. Berkeley on the dean’s list. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Steve Ryals, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Steve Ryals: Thank you, David. It’s great to be here.

Dr. Dave: Well, it’s wonderful that we both can be here. We’re both struggling against our own adversities. You’ve had a fire going up there, and I’ve been struggling with a summer cold, which by contrast is very minor. But tell me what’s been going on in terms of the fire.

Ryals: Well, there’s actually multiple fires. There’s the... We have an extraordinary view where we live. Looks...in the Mendocino County mountains, we can see all the way to the ocean, about 20 air miles away. So we can see a strip of ocean when

it's clear. This morning it is so smoky, we cannot probably see more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile. And these lightning strikes that happened Friday night and then even more strongly very early Saturday morning resulted in, I think they said 60 fires in Mendocino County alone.

Dr. Dave: Oh, my goodness.

Ryals: What I heard on the news this morning is that most of them are under an acre, and there are only about 20 of them actually have people on them right now because resources are strained so thinly. The big fire that we're most concerned with right now is I believe called the Flint Creek Running Springs fire, or something like that, and it's at least 1,400 acres. And we do have some friends who've been evacuated, and they said they'd evacuated down in the Montgomery Woods or Springs area. And to people who are familiar with the area, the Montgomery Woods Redwood Reserve is just about five miles down Orr Springs Rd. from us. So we finally saw a great sight, which was a couple of the Cal Fire bombers finally dropped some loads of retardant between us and the fire before sunset last night. And my wife took some before-and-after pictures, and you could really see a difference in terms of, you know, when those smoke plumes really start to build from the heat. And so this had lay down quite a bit, so supposedly the fire is going to be running south and west of us, kind of away from us. And so we were very close to evacuating; we had somebody literally down the road from us who was ordered to evacuate, but they did not order us to.

Dr. Dave: Yes, when I spoke with you last night, you weren't sure but what you would be having to evacuate, and we weren't sure if we'd be able to speak this morning. And you told me that you've been working on the fire lines, actually, through the night...

Ryals: Yes, my wife and I were called out. We're part of a community called Greenfield Ranch, and the ranch next to us is called Singley Ranch. And so we went out and worked with our neighbors and community on our fire line yesterday for about three hours, and felt like we had it fairly well contained. There are no [CDF](#) around at all. We were just all doing this. People had their own tools. Somebody brought in a pickup truck with a 300-gallon tank on it and a pump, and we ran hose all the way down this *incredibly* steep hill. And we're wailin' away and had established a fire line, and it seemed like we had it well in hand. And we came back and later, yesterday evening, they said that it had exploded. The wind had shifted, and the fire exploded out of that canyon. And so they were working all night long to establish new fire line, which they think they have now. I mean, one of the local people just brought his bulldozer. You know, there's still no CDF there.

Dr. Dave: Wow, wow. Well, I certainly wish you well as this situation continues to unfold. And we're going to be talking today about your own spiritual journey and the book that you've recently brought out, called *Drunk With Wonder: Awakening*

to the God Within. And certainly when these kinds of external events happen in our lives, it can kind of put to test our spiritual stance.

Ryals: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. As I was reading through your book, I was reminded of the folksong – I don't know if you ever heard it – "[Lonesome Traveler](#)," which has a line... I think it goes something like, "I've traveled low and I've traveled high." And elsewhere, "I've traveled rich and I've traveled poor." And I don't know if you've been a lonesome traveler, but clearly, it's been quite a journey. It also put me in mind of the line from "Amazing Grace" that goes, "I once was lost, but now I'm found." So, let's start from that place where you were down and lost. Your book actually starts out with you shooting speed back in 1968 at the age of 18. So tell us, how did you get there?

Ryals: Well...boy. I was raised in the '50s and '60s like maybe all the boomers, and I had parents who, bless their hearts, doin' the best they could. No emotional literacy skills at all, and I don't think anybody did to speak of back then. And frankly, I got raged on a lot. And I took that to mean – this is the Cliff Notes version, by the way – I took that to mean that there was something massively defective within me, massively broken, that could not be fixed...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm...

Ryals: And I learned very early how to distract myself from those kinds of feelings. First it was reading; I was reading by the age of four. And I did spend a lot of time alone, even though I was the oldest – I am the oldest – of five boys. I was ridiculed in school, I was one of the geeks, I had to have glasses in the first grade and wound up being the guy who was picked last for sports and overweight, yada yada...you know that...

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah. Right.

Ryals: ...that litany...

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: And when I got into junior high school, I was being bullied so much that I, what I did is, in a sense, I broke, and I started smoking cigarettes. And I had a friend who was stealing them so that I could get a pack of cigarettes out for the kids who had been bullying me. And all of a sudden I stopped being bullied! So I thought, oh, this is cool, and ah, I'll just go in this direction. So, the direction that eventually led to was, was getting into drugs, and instead of fighting – because I'd never been in a fight in my life, still haven't...at least not a physical one (laughs) – I just went farther into the drug world. So that by the time I was, oh, 17, the kids at my high school who had been bullying me were coming to me for drug purchases.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: And so I was suddenly the “cool kid.”

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: And so, I just, I went off in that direction, and I kept finding ways to look tougher in my own eyes. You know, I had an earring for the first time when I was 17 and was shooting drugs when I was 17. And this was considered – believe it or not – it was considered “cool.” I was also smoking cigarettes and so on and so forth. So, I just spiraled down through that, basically suicidal because I felt like my parents didn’t care whether I lived or died. So, I... that culminated in a night in a crash pad in Riverside, California, in April of 1968, when one of my best friends in the area where I had lived with my parents came to visit me and was disgusted and extremely angry at seeing me basically dying. I was very emaciated and...

Dr. Dave: Mmmm.

Ryals: ...you know, so high, so he – and I don’t recommend this, to try this at home, kids – but he shoved a *large* dose of LSD down my throat and said, “This is either going to kill you or cure you. Right now, I don’t much care which,” and stormed out. And so, I went off on this amazing experience where I wound up literally having an out-of-body experience, which was quite a spiritual (laughs) experience in itself...

Dr. Dave: Hmm...

Ryals: ...and looked down at my own body. And I was, “Oh, my gosh! Carl’s right! I am killing myself!”

Dr. Dave: Hmmm...

Ryals: So, do I want to live or do I want to die? If I want to die, I could just go back down in my body, shoot a big dose of speed, and I’m outta here. And it was tempting. And I didn’t, obviously. I came down instead on the side of living, and that was it for speed. That was it. I, I called my folks, and they came and got me the next day, and I moved back home.

Dr. Dave: Did I read that you actually heard a voice? I don’t know if you experienced it as a voice outside yourself, or within yourself, or what during that episode. That you heard some voice of sanity?

Ryals: Yes. Well, in effect, it felt like...I, I shrugged it off as – you know, we, I think everyone talks to themselves in a way. You know, you hear, “Oh, you should do this. Oh, I don’t want to do that,” you know... it’s kind of back and forth. I didn’t

really get it as a kind of a “higher self,” or a larger, much more expansive self. And yes, I did. It was very clear that this voice was saying, “Why are you...you do have a choice. You can live or die.”

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: “Do you want to live or die?”

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: And I decided I wanted to live. So, as I said, I went back home; I reestablished connection with this friend, who was back living with his parents as well. We had been roommates for a while. And three weeks later, he was killed in a motorcycle accident...

Dr. Dave: Oh, my goodness.

Ryals: ...which sent me off, of course, in a whole other direction of not having any idea what to do with my feelings. And within a couple of months, I discovered the joy of alcohol, and what a great numbing agent that is! And I proceeded to use alcohol as a numbing agent countless times for the next 33 years and quit almost 7 ½ years ago now.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. You say you “bathed” yourself in alcohol for 33 years, avoiding the big questions as to your feelings of isolation and the meaning of life. And yet, and I guess during that same period, you went through a lot of major ups and downs. I saw in the bio in your book that you made and lost a lot of money, maybe you can... We’re all interested in money at some level (laughs), so...tell us about your adventures with money.

Ryals: Well, yeah, I mean, you know, I went from... literally, in my life, I have been homeless and was living on the streets in San Francisco in 1967. So, I had that experience, and at one point in time, my former wife and I had a business that’s still in operation in Oakland. I have been part of it for a long time, but we were generating hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in income and had two nice homes and toys and trips and you know, all that. And I had the very clear experience of going from a graduate from U.C. Berkeley and dreaming of making a thousand dollars a month, thinking, oh, that’ll be *plenty* of money! And then at one point in my life, we were grossing close to \$20,000 a month. And it still wasn’t enough because all of our bills had increased exponentially.

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Ryals: And so, I finally got off that train because I got it, from personal experience, that when we’re looking for, when we’re looking to make ourselves okay or good enough *outside* of ourselves, we’re never going to get there. ‘Cause there’s always

something, somewhere else to go, something else to do, something else to buy, etc., etc. So, I feel blessed that I've had that experience, because now I know that there, you know, that's a treadmill...

Dr. Dave: Yes, right...

Ryals: ...and there's no end to it. And then, when I quit drinking, I had... During my last years of drinking, we'd started an Internet business. And when I quit drinking, I went, oh, this is all crashing! This is nuts! I'm...I've really been blowing it, and I went bankrupt. So, I went from feeling really wealthy and having the trappings of success to having nothing, in terms of physical – essentially physical – assets, and found myself far happier, actually, in the last few years than I've been in my entire life. It's fascinating, a fascinating ride.

Dr. Dave: Yes. (laughs) You can see why that folksong came to mind. (laughs)

Ryals: Sure.

Dr. Dave: "I've traveled cold, I've traveled hungry. I've traveled up, I've traveled down." I can't remember all the words. Now, a key turning point came to you in the form of a hypnotherapy session with your friend Marilyn. Tell us about that.

Ryals: Yes, that happened back in 1991. I had awakened out of a dream. It's the only dream that I can ever remember awakening from in which I was laughing when I woke up. It was such a joyous, amazing dream, and I was so fascinated by that, that my friend, Marilyn, had recently become a hypnotherapist – as I say, this is back in 1991. So, I went to see her and it turned out that she recorded the session, and she discovered through her own therapeutic means that there was a voice inside of me that wanted to talk – that was available to talk – and started a conversation with this voice and recorded it, as I said. So we just went through a process of quite a few of those, and then I learned, became a basic hypnotherapist myself. Essentially, all I did with it was learn to hypnotize myself so that I could bring this voice through. And that continued regularly until I quit drinking and then discovered that (laughs), that I had been creating this sense of separation and that I was ready to start integrating this wisdom side of me, which is what came through in the book, so that I no longer have to say all this, you know, my good side's out here somewhere in the heavens, and little old me is over here, and so on. I began to take that...responsibility for being, for being a much larger awareness. And I think, and I think everybody, frankly, has that capability; I don't think it's limited to me at all, or limited to a few at all. I think it's inherent in every one of us.

Dr. Dave: That's fascinating. Initially in that, after that first hypnotic, or those first hypnotic sessions, I gather you had no recollection for what you said. And that you – when she read these transcripts back to you, there was a shock of, boy, where is *this* coming from?

Ryals: Well, shock and fear.

Dr. Dave: And fear...

Ryals: I really, I remember distinctly the evening of that first session, you know, getting pretty drunk and stoned. Just sitting there, kind of, really...boy, the guys in the white coats are going to be comin' for me now...

Dr. Dave: Hmm..

Ryals: I would just... You know, I was, had been going through a spiritual growth process, with (?) a lot of books; like many people, the [Seth](#) material and different things that were popular in the seventies, and so on, and the eighties... I was fascinated by all this material but I kind of pooh-poohed it at the same time: Ah, come on... you know. I really, you know, came out of a non-Christian, Unitarian Universalist, very rational background...

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Ryals: Humanistic, rational background, with no real sense of spirit. And so it was a long, I mean (laughs)... Twenty years ago, I would not utter the word, God. I would not use it at all. So, it's been quite a long ride, and at this point in time, I am, you know... I feel like when I'm talking to you, David, about this story, it's really almost as if I'm talking about someone else.

Dr. Dave: Sure. I know that feeling. Sometimes, when I look at my own past (laughs) I feel like I'm telling a story, you know, about somebody else that I barely feel any connection to. I was intrigued by what you were saying a little bit earlier about the integration of this, and you mentioned the Seth materials. So there are all these books that came out during the seventies and since, of what's called "channeled wisdom," where there's some entity in some other dimension, or plane, or reincarnated or something that's channeling this information. Do I understand you correctly to say that you might've seen it in that light initially, but that you're seeing it in a somewhat different light now?

Ryals: Very much so, yes. I had it set up, I had my story, (laughs) if you will, set up that I'm channeling this being named Arondaho (sp) – and that's what he called himself – and it was popular for people to come and have sessions with Arondaho, and we recorded them and gave them, you know, all this kind of stuff. And so that was the language that I used. That was the best language I had, was that this was this other entity out there somewhere. I've since become much more interested in non-dual awareness and letting go of stories that separate, of duality, whenever I can. So, I'm reminded of [Marianne Williamson](#)'s famous quote, that was at first attributed, I think, to Nelson Mandela. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, but our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure..."

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Ryals: “It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.” So that is where I have come to in my own integration, is that I decided that I needed to step into this far larger presence and awareness and stop being a victim; stop making other people or institutions wrong, making them to blame for my experience in the world...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: ...and begin to just take mastery of what do I choose in this moment?

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: And if something’s going on that isn’t working for me, instead of blaming someone else – which is so easy to do (laughs) – I just am able, sooner or later – not always immediately – to stop and go, okay, I need to take ownership of this and make another choice. And do it with love and compassion, and kindness, and create the life of my dreams, which I have far more of the life of my dreams than I could have imagined possible when this whole thing started.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well, that’s really wonderful. You found that embracing your – I was intrigued – that you found embracing your higher self to be somewhat of a mixed bag in terms of your ability to come to terms with it and not feel like you were losing your mind.

Ryals: Well, you know, (laughs) we have these stories that we grow up with. We certainly have many different ways of languaging this. I liken it to, in the book, I liken it to the pearl that an oyster grows to shelter itself from a grain of sand. You know, it uses calcium carbonate, I think, to create this beautiful, opalescent pearl that people find extremely valuable. And so, they pull it out of an oyster, and they pull it out, you know; hold it in their thumb and their forefinger. “Isn’t this a beautiful pearl? Now, it would be perfect as soon as I get a drill and drill out the grain of sand. Then it’ll be fine.” No, we don’t do that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Ryals: And so, in my own work with personal growth, I realized that the stories we are raised with, that the emotional traumas that we have, that we then come up with some kind of story to explain, usually involving something like, “I’m wounded; therefore, I am,” that in order to truly heal out of that place, to move beyond and stop, in essence, being a victim; in other words, “I’m wounded; therefore, I act like a jerk,” “I’m wounded; therefore, I treat my wife like crap,” “I’m wounded; therefore, I speed and endanger people and drink excessively,” or what have you. When we stop doing all of those things and can just kind of go, “Wow! I had these stories, and I can really appreciate how my inner kid – my little kid – can really be terrified with all this stuff. And here and now, I’m not that little kid anymore. He

lives inside me, but I can just pick him up and hold him and love him and soothe him, and I don't have to let him run the show anymore." But there's a sense of grieving in that. There's a sense of dying to our old stories. And that's a non-trivial – and I'm sure you'll agree, David – that's a non-trivial thing to do, and it scares a lot of people to death to even think about letting go of these stories of who we thought we were in order to grow into more of the full possibility of expression. (repetition of first several sentences up to this point). So most of the fear, most of the time in our culture, is emotional in nature, at least the way I see it. And specifically, afraid of feeling our emotions, because when we don't have any skills or any models for how to do feelings in a healthy way – and I want to emphasize “healthy” and “responsible” – we wind up leaking out our full, you know, full balloons, as we call them in an organization I'm involved with called [Challenge Day](#). And we leak them out on people who are closest to us. We leak them out in school shootings. We leak them out – or pop them, really – in suicides. And, you know, two of the leading causes of death in teens are suicide and murder. And then accidents, and drinking to excess...

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Ryals: ...and causing accidents, and so on. And these, all of these, can be correlated directly down to the same issue, which is that people feel isolated and separate and alone, and they don't have anybody that they feel safe in talking to about their feelings, they don't have any models about *how* to talk about their feelings – what feelings they even have – and so we have an intoxicated, inebriated society that's devoted to distracting itself from what's really going on inside. Of course, that makes a great populist for instilling fear and politicians getting elected based on scaring the holy heck out of people...

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah. There's a lot of that going on these days. (laughs)

Ryals: And then, of course, the other side of that is, if we as a culture can convince the people who live in the culture that they're not good enough, in and of themselves, then we can keep selling them things and telling them that if you only buy this, or you have this car, or this house, or this job, or these clothes, or this perfume, this jewelry, this kind of a trophy wife or trophy husband, *then* you'll be good enough. And of course, as we talked about earlier in the show, when we're looking outside of ourselves to be good enough, you know, we're always looking for something else.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Now, you even talk about that we're biologically programmed for fear. I think you make some reference to the amygdala and so on; a lot of interest in the brain these days. Tell us a little bit about that.

Ryals: Okay. Well, some of the latest brain research, which I'm fascinated by, is that scientists – researchers – have mapped out the five most primal emotions down right into the reptilian brain, and these are activated by the amygdala. And that is

fear, which the full-blown version is panic; anger, the full-blown version is rage; there's separation anxiety, think of the kid going to school for the first day; there's lust, of course, for procreation; and perhaps the most fascinating one that people are really unaware of is seeking behavior. There's that kind of seeking behavior that will have people go, "I wonder what's over that mountain. I wonder what's over that ridge. What's goin' on over there?"

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: And that's down below our mammalian brain, because we kind of have a triune brain. The reptilian brain sits on the brainstem, and then the mammalian brain pretty much surrounds that, and then we have the prefrontal cortex. And our thinking language centers and so on that are the most recent addition. But one of the things I found most fascinating, David, is there aren't a lot of really big, kind of like superhighways of neurons between these various parts of our brains. They're relatively independent. I mean, we can have extremely serious brain damage, to where we're in a vegetative or coma state, but if the reptilian brain is still functioning normally, the body will still ingest, or be capable of ingesting, nutrition; and releasing toxins and waste and breathing and the heart beating, and so on and so forth. It's completely outside of our, what we call our conscious awareness. So, when I talk about these really basic emotions of being programmed for fear, we're programmed to survive long enough to procreate.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: And when we're – you know, you imagine being in a (laughs), imagine being in a jungle somewhere, for example, and there's that low cough from a big cat that you hear right behind you. So, you want to be up a tree really quickly.

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Right.

Ryals: You don't want to stop and go, "Gosh, I wonder if I should be worried about that."

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Ryals: Because about that time, you're dinner. And so, we are programmed, and it's both our visual neuronal pathways – the visual (my brain's, I'm having a "senior moment" here) – but these big neuronal pathways that go from our visuals and go from our hearing bypass our higher reasoning.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Ryals: They have these, they activate through the amygdala into our body and have the body react in very powerful and very fast ways, because we don't have time to think about it. When you imagine jumping out of the way of a car, if you stepped

off a curb, that's something I think many people have experienced. So, what I'm saying here is that there is a fear response that is entirely appropriate, even though we don't need it very often these days. And of course, one of the things that happens is when we get scared, we have a tremendous surge of adrenaline. And that's (laughs), I think most people would agree, that's a rush. Well, when you're shooting drugs, that's a rush...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: ...so we're really going for the rush. And I think many – perhaps almost every single person on the planet – is addicted to adrenaline at one level or another. And so, we have these different ways that people get their adrenaline “fix.” And many of those ways I find completely foreign, like jumping out of an airplane or watching horror movies; you know, fill in the blank.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: But I have my own ways to get my adrenaline fix, and one of them is being interviewed (laughs), for example...

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Right.

Ryals: ...and talking about my feelings and getting real.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Ryals: That, to me, is endlessly fascinating and endlessly exciting. And you know, one of my favorite things, David, is that fear is excitement without breath.

Dr. Dave: “Fear is excitement without breath.”

Ryals: So, if you find yourself afraid...

Dr. Dave: Yes?

Ryals: ...for, I mean, and you're not being chased by a big cat, for example...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: ...but you're just anxious about something...

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: ...try breathing.

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Ryals: Try consciously stopping whatever you're doing. Stop the doing for a moment, and just take a deep breath, and breathe into the fear. (breathes)

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah.

Ryals: And you'll notice your heart rate start to drop, and you'll notice things start to change physiologically, because when we get fearful and we're not aware of it, our breathing gets very shallow and fast. And it's really hard to think clearly.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Yes. And I find bringing myself into the present to be very helpful, because often, that fear response for me is about some anticipated thing that's in the future, but it isn't really here at this moment.

Ryals: That's very true, and I talk about that extensively in *Drunk with Wonder*, where I really strongly... You asked earlier, how do we get past this fear? How do we start getting farther down our road of consciousness? And it is by... I don't know of any other way to do this other than by some form of mindfulness meditation...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: ...or becoming present, which, for me, meditation has been that tool, over and over again for almost – oh, gosh – 28 years now. And that involves – for me it involves – breathing and becoming aware of my thoughts, and becoming aware that I am not any of my thoughts, and allowing the thoughts to come and go, and continuing to breathe and be present, as present as I can. When I notice that I'm lost in a thought again, I just gently let that thought go and come back to the present moment.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Ryals: And do that for years. And it really, it's made an enormous difference in my life.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Let's talk about love a bit, because I think you, you do talk about love as one way of counteracting this sort of fear-based consciousness that we have.

Ryals: Sure. Well, I, you know, I... My personal experience is that love is the... Love and life are the ultimate gifts of the animating presence of the universe, however you wish to language that. And I do personally experience the universe as *not* random. I think that's kind of the core that I've been able to come to in terms of basic life questions. Is the universe random? Is life just random, or is there some organizing principle of some kind behind it? And I've just had to come down on the side of, there's some organizing principle. If you study the Earth, study Gaia, and study the way that this planet has been able to keep a rough equilibrium that allows life to flourish, even with monstrous meteorite impact, asteroid impacts over the millennia. I just, I don't think it's random. I think every day, we're seeing new

discoveries of more and more planets. They just had an announcement the other day that now that they've got better instrumentation, they're seeing *way* more planets. And they just know they're coming very close to finding more and more Earth-like planets that are capable of supporting life. I think life is all over the universe. And I think that pure, unconditional love – which I believe is the animating principle of the universe – that the greatest gift that pure, unconditional love could possibly give is life itself, the opportunity to experience love for one another. So, want to choose love over fear? Again, you have to be present. You have to be willing to find a way for you that works for you to become present into the moment. Because that's the only time we ever have, if you will, to make a choice...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: ...love or fear.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: There's... You can't do it in the past; you can't do it in the future. You can only do it right now. In this moment, I choose love.

Dr. Dave: Choice... yeah, choice is like a key doorway. And I noticed that you put a fair amount of emphasis on choice. I'm very interested in that.

Ryals: Yes, choice is... Choice becomes available when we are able to step out of the stories. We spoke earlier in the program about being stuck in our stories of fear and lack. Stuck in "I'm not good enough," stuck in some kind of a victim story that somebody else is responsible for my experience; therefore I'm helpless. There's nothing I can do, you know. We have to be willing to do the practice, do the work, so that we can become present and step out of that story. Realize "I am not my stories." So, once we're able to do that, we can begin to make choices. As long as we're – and I know this may sound "jargony" – but as long as we're thrown to the stories we grew up with, there's a level in which we're running a program, like a computer. We're not able to make conscious choices outside of the context of that program. So, if we're tired of the program we've been running and we realize that, then we have the opportunity to make different choices and change our lives radically, like quit drinking, or quit smoking, or get out of a relationship that isn't working anymore, or throw open the doors of our heart and invite in the relationship of our dreams. Invite in the career of our dreams, or what have you.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. You know, there's so many personal growth, self-help, spiritual books out there. What drove you to write this book? I mean, a book takes a lot of work, a lot of effort, a lot of time. What drove you to produce this?

Ryals: Well, David, I just... I feel like I have been gifted with a specific piece of the puzzle that I needed, to move me along my path. And I realize and deeply honor

and respect that there are so many different paths and so many different ways that people can kind of wake up to taking on more of who they really are, and stepping into a world where we can become our own heroes. And for me, the piece that I feel has been missing from the eastern philosophies – because I really appreciate Buddhism a lot, and I appreciate a lot of Hindu thought – and my heart really connects with a lot of that and a lot of the shamanistic teachings that...Earth teachings, paganism, all that kind of stuff. I get bits and pieces from that...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Ryals: ...and I put them in the book. The piece that I have felt was missing is that – largely missing – is that instead of treating the ego as a problem to be solved – or in some cases, people are extreme enough to say, “We need to kill the ego,” in essence.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: We need to get rid of it completely.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Ryals: My believe is that that’s like drilling into the pearl...

Dr. Dave: Mmmm...(laughs)

Ryals: ...to pull out the grain of sand.

Dr. Dave: Uh-huh...

Ryals: I think that that’s... Frankly, I think it’s missing the point completely. I think that particularly in our culture, where we are actively engaged in the world – and I’m socially progressive and want a sustainable future for my granddaughter, and so on – we’ve got to take action. And in order to take action, we’ve got to be willing to embrace these old stories, but then not let them run us anymore, by becoming present and becoming aware that they’re *stories*; they’re not the literal truth, and that we can tell different stories. First we have to know that we can do it, and then we have to be willing to invent the stories. So the piece in the book that I think... And I’ve heard – I’ve had hundreds of comments about this, literally – that what I’m giving people is an opportunity to see how, when we are lost in our emotions, or specifically, lost and trying to keep ourselves from feeling feelings that are scary or threatening. Because we’ve never had a model of realizing that any feeling, fully felt, shifts. In other words, we spend all our time... So many of us spend all of our passion and all of our, so much of who we are and our energy, trying to keep ourselves, keep the feelings walled away, you know? Keep them locked away, when if we were able to learn how to feel them in healthy and responsible ways, that all that pent-up energy would just flood through us and dissipate. And then that

passion for life would be available to us again. And one of the astonishing things about going through this process of feeling our feelings – and I keep emphasizing, in healthy and responsible ways – is that we can think more clearly. It's an amazing thing, but really the bottom line is that we're able to think more clearly. We're able to be present in the moment because we're not sitting on this tsunami of unfelt feelings.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Well, you know there's so much more that we could talk about and that we haven't touched upon (laughs) in your book. We could go on quite a bit longer. For example, you've got an interest in quantum physics, and we really don't have time to go into that and talk about that. I think there's a lot about what you've written here that I personally really resonate with. And I could've easily been turned off. I have difficulty with channeled books and so on, but I find there's a balance and a humility in your, in the way that you come across and what you've written here. I like the title of your book, *Drunk With Wonder*. It reminds me of the [Sufi](#) poet, [Rumi](#)...

Ryals: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: ...who I'm sure you're familiar with...

Ryals: Well, that's where I got the idea.

Dr. Dave: Oh! Okay, yeah. His work...

Ryals: Rumi and [Hafez](#).

Dr. Dave: Yeah! And their work embodies that sort of passion. And you spent many years addicted to drugs and alcohol. And I think many times, people who become addicted to various substances are doing so out of their hunger for transcendence.

Ryals: Absolutely.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Ryals: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, I read Hafez or I read Rumi, and I, they bring me to tears.

Dr. Dave: Hmm...

Ryals: And the tears of wonder. When I say *Drunk With Wonder*, I really, literally want to be provocative in the sense that I believe in experience, that the most amazing, intoxicated experience I ever had in my life has been easily overshadowed by my being drunk with spirit, and being intoxicated with having deep, intimate, loving, caring connections with people. And just walking out and seeing the most astonishing sunset is *incredibly* intoxicating to me.

Dr. Dave: Steve, that's a wonderful place for us to close. I want to thank you so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Ryals: Thank you, David. It was a pleasure to be with you, and I'd be happy to come back on and talk about quantum physics or anything else you'd like sometime.