

Ralph Metzner

EXPLORER OF CONSCIOUSNESS

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF
A PSYCHEDELIC PIONEER

Edited by
Cathy Coleman, Ph.D.

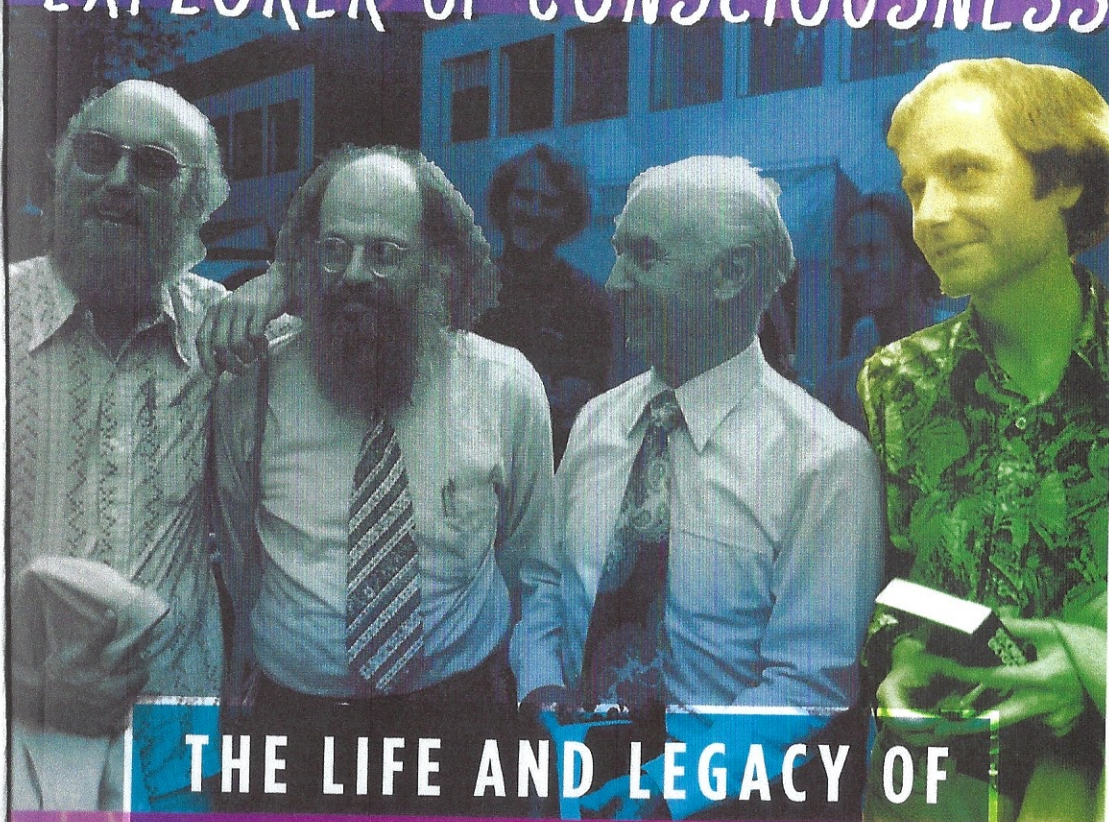


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- Thank the soul or entity on the other side for their love and knowledge.
- Between sessions think about the things you'd like to know, or wish help with. Consult your channeling notebook to review what you've learned so far.

Channeling requires no special powers and works for most who try it. In truth, it is nothing more than realizing the awareness that we are all connected, living and dead, holding each other in a web of eternal love. That's what channeling is, and that's what Ralph gave me.

Afterlife Journey of the Soul in Jewish Mysticism and Tradition

Simcha Paull Raphael

Reb Simcha Paull Raphael, Ph.D., is founding director of the DA'AT Institute for Death Awareness, Advocacy and Training. He received his ordination as a rabbinic pastor from Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (1990). He works as a psychotherapist and spiritual director in Philadelphia. He is author of numerous publications including the groundbreaking *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*.

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

From 1979–1988 Ralph Metzner served as academic dean of the California Institute of Integral Studies, where I was a doctoral student in Integral Counseling Psychology. After completing my coursework, in the summer of 1980, I reached that juncture when I had to select a dissertation topic and committee. Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., was a natural choice as head of my doctoral dissertation committee. He brought to this work more than simply the administrative portfolio of academic dean of CIIS.

First of all, my dissertation topic, "Judaism's Contribution to the Psychology of Death and Dying," was an exploration of life after death

in Judaism with applications for working with the dying and bereaved. Only in the avant-garde transpersonally oriented program of the CIIS, which Ralph helped to envision and shape, could one write a psychology dissertation on survival of consciousness after death.

Ralph brought the synthesis of his Harvard University psychological training and his creative explorations of visionary states of consciousness to his work at CIIS to help spawn an environment for in-depth study of the human psyche. Being a student at CIIS in the late 1970s felt to me similar to what it might have been like in ancient Greece at the time of the philosophers, with new winds of thought permeating every corner of our intellectual and spiritual *weltanschauung* (worldview). And without any doubt, Ralph was one of the midwives of that environment.

Secondly, my other doctoral dissertation advisor, Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the Jewish Renewal movement and widely known teacher of contemporary Kabbalah, was a long-time colleague of Ralph's. They had met in the 1960s at the home of Timothy Leary in Millbrook, New York. And (as I recently discovered) Reb Zalman had published an article on his own psychedelic journey in Ralph's anthology *The Ecstatic Adventure*.

TRANSPERSONAL PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THIS PROJECT

In retrospect, I can see that specific principles that guided my work, influenced by the emerging psychology of consciousness of CIIS, were ideas that had appeared in Ralph's writings.

First of all, in his 1964 book *The Psychedelic Experience* (co-authored with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert), Ralph and his colleagues endeavored to present a *phenomenological depiction of states of consciousness*. Without judgment, evaluation, or reductionist interpretation, this directly describes nonordinary, suprarational states of mind and being. *The Psychedelic Experience* drew on the Tibetan Book of the Dead as a model to describe what happens to the human mind as consciousness

separates from the body and to compare these states of being with the psychedelic experience.

In my research and writing, I likewise used a phenomenological approach to look at little-known afterlife teachings in Jewish mysticism and tradition. My research explored a wide swath of historical ideas on life after death in three millennia of Jewish sacred texts. I got to wade through obscure—but fascinating—texts on life after death in Judaism. I never had to validate the use of a phenomenological approach because Ralph already supported it, and, even more, phenomenology had become a standard academic approach at CIIS in the 1980s.

Secondly, another operating objective guiding my work was similar to that which Ralph had written about in the mid-1970s in his book *Maps of Consciousness*—where he described the journey of consciousness in multiple spiritual paradigms of world religions. My research focused on the afterlife journey of the soul and correlated states of mind in Jewish mystical texts; but given the world religions/interfaith orientation of CIIS, also on Theosophy, Tibetan Buddhism, and contemporary near-death experience literature.

I worked to create a cartography of the afterlife journey. That question of what a cartography of the postmortem journey would look like became the guiding focus in my exploration of biblical, apocryphal, rabbinic, medieval, kabbalistic, and Chasidic texts on the afterlife.

I was not only interested in the “what?”—what does Judaism have to say about life after death?—but also the “so what?”—if consciousness survives bodily death, so what do we do about that? How does an assumption of postmortem survival of the consciousness affect ways we companion the dying and comfort the bereaved?

Ralph grounded his own research in visionary states of consciousness in psychological healing work with clients. He developed a unique way of combining the spiritual and the psychological, the cosmic and the practical. In the spirit of my CIIS training, the ultimate applied goal of my research was to be of service to others in the healing of both

psyche and spirit, particularly with regard to the human encounter with dying and death.

THE FOURFOLD MODEL OF THE AFTERLIFE JOURNEY IN JEWISH MYSTICISM AND TRADITION

What follows is a brief summary of what my research revealed. Essentially, I found within the Jewish sources a fourfold model of the afterlife journey that has parallels in religious traditions around the world.²

Readers may be interested in the following summary of current and historical Jewish literature as a context for comparison of both after-death and psychedelic-induced states of consciousness.

1. *Separation of Consciousness*

The first stage of the postmortem journey in both traditional and mystical Jewish sources is called *Hibbut Ha-Kever*, “the pangs of the grave.” It is a relatively brief process of the separation of consciousness from the body.

In this earliest stage, as consciousness leaves the body, Jewish sources describe a series of visionary phenomena experienced by the disembodied consciousness. For example, we find the following in the medieval mystical text, the *Zohar*.

On seeing deceased ancestors:

Rabbi Shimon said: Have you seen today the image of your father? For so we have learnt, that at the hour of a man's departure from the world, his father and his relatives gather round him, and he sees them and recognizes them, and likewise all with whom he

2. The Tibetan Book of the Dead presents three stages, or *bardos* (transit stages), of the afterlife journey. I maintain that the second stage, Peaceful and Wrathful Deities, is in some sense parallel to the heaven and hell depiction in other traditions.

associated in this world, and they *accompany his soul to where it is to abide*. (Zohar I, Ron a)

On seeing mythic or archetypal guides:

When one departs this world . . . they see many strange things on their way and *meet Adam, the first person, sitting at the gates Gan Eden*, ready to welcome all who have observed the commands of their Master. (Zohar, I 65b)

On the postmortem life review:

When God desires to take back a person's spirit, *all the days that they have lived passed before God in review*. (Zohar I, 221b)

Always fascinating to me was that the twelfth-century Kabbalists were reporting the exact same kinds of dying and after-death visions as chronicled in NDE reports and being seen in hospital rooms and intensive care units today. This affirmed for me the universality of the inner dimension of dying; it is clear that our medical establishment still has a long way to go to understand the inner intricacies of the transpersonal and transcendent experiences people have as they are dying.

Another noteworthy observation from my research, specifically with regard to practical application of afterlife teachings, was discovering a connection between contemporary Jewish ritual practices and ancient afterlife teachings. For example, a traditional Jewish mourning practice is the observance of *shiva*, a seven-day ritual of communal mourning immediately following a burial (the word *shiva* means "seven"). One is said to "sit shiva," literally sitting on low stools and being surrounded by family and friends who gather to comfort the mourners and remember the bereaved. If done with intentionality and communal support, observance of shiva tends to be an efficacious grief ritual, helping mourners deal with grief and loss.

At the conclusion of seven days of shiva, a traditional practice is for mourners to walk around the block. Psychologically this act is seen as a reentry into the world; having taken time out of ordinary life to mourn a loved one, the bereaved begin to slowly reenter life. On a spiritual level, walking around the block is a symbolic act in which the mourner accompanies the spirit of the deceased on its journey. It is as if the mourner says, "We can walk you only this far . . . now you have to go the rest of the way on your own to be 'gathered to the ancestors,'" as it says in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 25:8, Abraham; Gen. 35:29, Isaac; Gen. 49:29, Jacob).

2. Purification

Subsequently, the second stage of the postmortem journey in rabbinic and kabbalistic sources is called Gehenna. This is a state of the purgation and purification of the soul. Essentially what this means is that after death there is a psychic, emotional residue one individual has to process—a working through of the incomplete layers of guilt, shame, regret, failed expectations, of lived life.

Unlike in Christianity, the leaders of rabbinic Judaism—many of whom were contemporaneous with St. Augustine, the author of *City of God*³—did not espouse a belief in eternal damnation. In Jewish sources, Gehenna is a maximum twelve-month process of purgation. Texts such as the following replicate images of a medieval penal colony, portraying Gehenna in a Dantesque fashion:

[These are the] punishments in Gehenna, and Isaiah saw them all . . . He saw two men hanging by their tongues; and he said, "O You who unveils the hidden, reveal to me the secret of this." He answered, "These are the men who slandered, therefore they are thus punished." (*Keitzad Din Ha-Kever*, 1–3)

3. Gerald Walsh, et al., trans., *St. Augustine—The City of God* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958).

I came to understand a very important point that has been foundational in my study of afterlife teachings in general: *depictions of heaven and hell in religious literature are not literal but are symbolic of states of mind*. This is something Ralph Metzner recognized in his own work, and he supported me as I worked to understand these kinds of traditional heaven-hell images through the lens of transpersonal psychology.

3. *Arriving at Levels of Being and Knowing*

The third stage of the afterlife journey is called Gan Eden, the heavenly Garden of Eden. As to be expected, this realm of postmortem experience is depicted in “heavenly” terms. One text describes Gan Eden as having “two gates of carbuncle, and sixty myriads of ministering angels.” In terms of the journey of consciousness this text speaks of how “angels remove from one the clothes in which they had been buried, and clothe them with eight robes of the clouds of glory” (*Masekhet Gan Eden*, 1–2). In other words, at a certain point in the postmortem process, we leave behind our terrestrial identity—“the clothes in which they had been buried”—and awaken to the higher realms of knowing and being. In the heavenly Garden of Eden, we harvest the fruits of our lifetime of accrued spiritual experience, and we continue evolving to higher levels of being and knowing.

4. *An Experience of God*

In some mystical texts (though not all) we find a fourth dimension of the afterlife journey of consciousness referred to as Tzror Ha-Hayyim, “the source of life.” Yes, Judaism does include reincarnation.

In one of his later books, *The Cycle of Life of the Human Soul*,⁴ Ralph tracks a similar and more expanded journey of the soul, as the subtitle of the book indicates: *Incarnation–Conception–Birth–Death–Hereafter–Reincarnation*. Clearly, these ideas are replicated cross-culturally, and they also occur in plant medicine experiences that Ralph explored and described in his writing.

FROM GRADUATE STUDENT TO AFTERLIFE SCHOLAR AND TRANSPERSONAL GRIEF COUNSELOR

Little did I know it at the time, but the work I did on my doctoral dissertation not only established the direction of my life’s work for the next four decades (and counting), but also provided me with opportunity to stay in touch with Ralph until the very last days of his life.

Over the years I have also continued research and writings as a scholar of afterlife teachings. I expanded the work of my dissertation into a book, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, which was published in 1994. In delineating little-known teachings on postmortem survival over the course of three millennia of Jewish thought, this book has been groundbreaking in the Jewish community and beyond. I have also had the chance to teach this material widely, in university psychology and religion departments, Jewish congregations, churches, senior centers, youth groups, and community centers across the United States and Canada, as well as in England and Israel.

The book has become a classic resource for study of life after death in Jewish mysticism and tradition. I have always been grateful to Ralph and CIIS for opening the way for me to do this kind of innovative study, especially given that life after death was not a topic of respectable inquiry in most academic settings (and still is not to this day).

RECONNECTING WITH RALPH

In 2009 a second expanded edition of the book was published; and a third, twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* was published in 2019. As the new book was being prepared for publication, I asked Ralph if he would write an endorsement for the back of the book. At that time, late 2018, Ralph’s health had been deteriorating but he graciously offered to write the endorsement. It certainly meant a lot to me that he agreed to do so; and I believe that for Ralph, having one of the graduate dissertations he had supervised four decades earlier be published as a twenty-fifth anniversary edition book meant a lot to him as well.

4. Ralph Metzner, *The Life Cycle of the Human Soul* (Berkeley, CA: Regent Press, 2011).

Once the book was released in early spring 2019, Ralph was sent a copy. His endorsement on the back cover was actually the last contribution to a publication he saw in his lifetime. Two days before Ralph died, his wife, Cathy Coleman, relayed to me that his copy of *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* arrived, and Cathy made sure that he saw it. Cathy saw it as a sign that his time to enter the afterlife was near. Ralph Metzner died on March 14, 2019.

After a lifelong journey exploring the depths and heights of human consciousness, it was as if the universe was saying, "Ralph Metzner, you've done your job, and you've done it well." May Ralph's indefatigable spirit of creativity continue to shine. I am ever-grateful that Ralph was a mentor, guide, and teacher in my life. His legacy lives on.

AFTERWORD BY CATHY COLEMAN

Regarding the Hibbut Ha-Kever, the first stage of the postmortem journey described above as consciousness leaves the body, when one sees deceased ancestors, I want to relate that about thirty hours before Ralph died, as he was falling asleep and in a liminal state, he said, "I am going home to my father . . . I am going home to see my mother . . . I am going home to see my son Ari . . . I am going home to see my good friend Angie . . . I am going home to see my good friend Tim Leary."

It was these five that he named . . . and the next night, about four-to-six hours before he died, he repeated the words about his mother and father. Tim Leary being among this group of five affirmed his close connection with Tim. I suppose they were all there to greet him at the gate.

I repeat from Simcha's text:

Rabbi Shimon said: Have you seen today the image of your father? For so we have learnt, that at the hour of a man's departure from the world, his father and his *relatives gather round* him, and he sees

them and recognizes them, and likewise all with whom he associated in this world, and they *accompany his soul to where it is to abide*. (Zohar I, 218a)

Friend, Inspirer, and Companion Roger Liggenstorfer, Christine Heidrich, and Markus Berger

Markus Berger is an ethnobotanist, drug researcher, author, and lecturer. He has written numerous books and articles on drug research and ethnobotany and is editor-in-chief of the magazine for psychoactive culture *Lucys Rausch*, copublished by Nachtschatten Verlag. He is also an organizer of congresses and events on psychoactive culture.

Christine Heidrich grew up in Hanover, Germany, and studied architecture at the University of Hanover and history and theory of architecture at ETH Zurich. She lives in Switzerland, where she works as an architect and as a cultural mediator for museum exhibitions and writes books and texts on recent architecture. As a part-time translator for Nachtschatten Verlag she has translated numerous works, including those by Ralph Metzner and Stanislav Grof, into German. She is co-owner and designer of Switzerland's first absinthe bar.

Roger Liggenstorfer is a Swiss author and publisher of various books focused on psychedelics and drug policy. He is the founder and managing director of the publishing house Nachtschatten Verlag in Solothurn and the initiator of several events on psychonautics and drug policy. He is the founder and president of Eve & Rave Switzerland and the manager and co-owner of Switzerland's first absinthe bar.

On March 14, 2019, at 4:20 hours, Ralph Metzner embarked on his last journey. He passed over at his home in California at the age of eighty-two years.

Ralph Metzner leaves behind a rich inheritance. He authored more than one hundred scientific contributions, around twenty books, and held countless lectures and workshops, including about the Alchemical Divination method he established. In collaboration with his wife Cathy,