

## Ralph Metzner - The Intrepid Explorer

Because I am not a scholar, I do not feel qualified to comment on Ralph Metzner's scholarly works. However, I do recognize a scholar when I meet one. My spiritual teacher once said that the way we can tell someone is enlightened is because we feel peace in their presence. It is not so much what they say or do, but what is evoked in us. Similarly, there is a certain signature that registers when we are in the presence of a true scholar, and from my first meeting with Ralph, I recognized this. He had a deep and genuine curiosity, and a passion for precise thinking. The breadth of his interests was expansive, and he was able to discern connections between seemingly disparate domains of information. But most of all, he invoked in those around him an inquisitiveness and wondering. Like peace indicating the presence of a sage, these evocations told me that I was in the presence of a true scholar.

His scholarship, however, was not merely academic - he was truly intrepid in his exploration of new frontiers. I considered Ralph a friend, colleague (I'm a psychiatrist), mentor and occasional collaborator, and it was through some of these collaborations that I came to appreciate Ralph's enthusiasm for exploration. Because I have a background in the Rolf method of bodywork, he voiced an interest in exploring the use of low dose ketamine and 5meo-DMT in bodywork sessions. He was thoughtful and attentive to the influence of the medicines, and he reported that the ketamine provided mild analgesia which allowed deep tissue work with minimal discomfort, and the "Jaguar," as he called 5meo-DMT markedly enhanced the energetic and psychological dimensions of the bodywork. My experience working with him was that it was almost a kind of "autotherapy" - material emerged, he explored it dispassionately, and once there was understanding of the matter, he seemed to let it go.

On another occasion, he asked if I would help him explore the use of DMT enemas, a route of administration new to him. He was well aware of the traditional use of herbal enemas in some South American cultures, and he wanted to understand the effects firsthand. He obtained some DMT fumarate, which would dissolve in water, and I obtained a catheter and syringe that would allow a solution to be administered rectally. On the appointed day, I

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dissolved the DMT in a small amount of water, and as I threaded the rubber catheter into Ralph's hairy little butt, I thought to myself how remarkable it was that his enthusiasm for exploration burned brightly even with advancing age. Sadly, on that day nothing happened, which I relate to a failure on my part to adequately research the matter. I used a fairly long catheter, thinking that administration of the DMT above the rectum would facilitate better absorption, but what I did, in fact, was confirm that tryptamines are broken down in the colon. This is due either because of a first pass effect, in which molecules absorbed in the gut go first to the liver where they are metabolized before getting to the brain, or because monoamine oxidase (the enzyme that breaks down DMT) is present in the colonic mucosa. Apparently, traditional psychoactive enemas introduced the sacrament only into the rectum, where there is no first pass effect and no monoamine oxidase. Ralph was not disappointed, however: it was simply more data.

I have seen many examples of this intrepidity over the years. He was frequently willing to explore new methods and molecules, but I never had any indication that his interest in psychedelics was about mere accumulation of novel experience, a trap that more than a few "psychonauts" have fallen into. He was always the scholar, and his interest in these materials was, as far as I could tell, exclusively about their possibilities for furthering understanding and healing. He was intrepid not just with regard to methods and molecules, but also ideas. His seminal work on green psychology and his early cautioning about the rise of fascism in this country are examples of this. Some of his ideas, for example, pertaining to pendulums or UFOs, were a bit beyond me, but that may reflect my limitations.

This is not to say that Ralph was completely open-minded. In my opinion, there can be a darker side to scholarship, which is that the impulse to know is sometimes subsumed into the urge to control. I would like to speak to these elements, not in any way as a criticism of Ralph, but rather in the service of painting a broader picture of his humanity. For example, almost everyone I know who attended his medicine circles describes his work facilitating psychedelic exploration as deeply masterful, and I certainly felt that I was in the presence of a

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true virtuoso in such retreats. And it is also true that a portion of these same individuals will, with a wry smile, acknowledge that Ralph's particular style, of using low doses of psychedelics to enhance a kind of guided journey of his design, was sometimes dissonant with their personal psychedelic flow. And these same wry smiles may reappear when speaking of the highly structured and directed dances Ralph would sometimes have us do at the end of ceremonies. Ralph's circles were carefully constructed, artfully executed and deeply meaningful, but there was little in the way of let-it-all-hang-out boogying. Ralph always remained at the helm.

I speak of this because I have been part of a medicine circle which is in some ways on the other end of the continuum. It was conceived as an experiment in a "leaderless" group. Although many of us had studied with Ralph and were deeply appreciative of his model, we wanted to explore the possibilities of not having a set leader, but rather allowing leadership functions to emerge spontaneously in any member, as needed. We have maintained some of Ralph's ceremonial structure, but the result of our deliberately leaderless structure has been a group with a decidedly Dionysian and playfully irreverent character. We have been meeting monthly for over two decades and on a rare occasion we have invited a guest or two to participate. On one of these, Ralph came along with other psychedelic luminaries, and we utilized a very potent brew. (I know because I prepared it.) This night was particularly wild and included an extended period in which I thrashed around on the floor, unaware of my surroundings. The next day Ralph loudly proclaimed that, "There can be no learning in a group such as this!" An account of this meeting and my experience is included in Ralph's *The Toad and Jaguar* as an example of a possession experience mismanaged. In another of his books he described our circle as, "below minimum standards." Of course, we all took this with good humor because of our love and respect for Ralph, and among ourselves we began referring to our group as the "Belowminatti." His criticism had no sting because of the years of irrefutable benefit each of us had accumulated from deeply, deeply letting go. And what is most interesting about all of this is that on occasion, Ralph continued to join us. I believe that this

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was yet another expression of his intrepid curiosity, in this case about what lies beyond being in control.