

**ShrinkRapRadio #386, January 16, 2014, An Update on Mind-Expanding Substances**

**David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Ralph Metzner, Ph.D.**

(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Yann Derobert)

**Excerpt:** *On today's show I'll be speaking with Dr Ralph Metzner about all things consciousness and psychedelic though as we will learn he is not fond of that term.*

**Introduction:** Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., a graduate of Oxford and Harvard, is a recognized pioneer in psychological, philosophical and cross-cultural studies of consciousness and its transformations. He collaborated with Leary and Alpert in classic studies of psychedelics at Harvard University in the 1960s, co-authored *The Psychedelic Experience* and was editor of *The Psychedelic Review*. He is a psychotherapist and Professor Emeritus at the California Institute of Integral Studies, where he was also the Academic Dean for ten years in the 1980s. His books include *The Unfolding Self*, *The Well of Remembrance*, *Green Psychology*, *The Expansion of Consciousness*, *Alchemical Divination* and *Mind Space and Time Stream*. He is the editor of two collections of essays on the pharmacology, anthropology, and phenomenology of ayahuasca and of psilocybin mushrooms. He is also the president and co-founder of the Green Earth Foundation, dedicated to healing and harmonizing the relations between humanity and the Earth. Now here's the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Ralph Metzner, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Ralph Metzner:** Thanks for inviting me.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, well, I'm happy to have you on the show. I think we've met a couple of times over the years. We certainly have lots of mutual friends and I've been hearing about your work for years. You're a widely recognized authority on consciousness and altered states of consciousness and psychedelics. And so I wanted to talk to you. So let's start by reaching back into your history. I believe you knew both Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, who later became Ram Dass, at Harvard, but I don't know in what

capacity you were at Harvard or how you came to be in their circle. Maybe we can start there...

**Ralph Metzner:** Sure. I was a graduate student and they were two professors

**Dr. Dave:** OK

**Ralph Metzner:** at Harvard in the late 50's, early 60's. I was there from 1958... I had come over England and did my undergraduate degree in psychology at Oxford University. And I joined Harvard – what they called the Center for Research in Personality. I did a Ph. D. there that covered also social psychology, political psychology, socio-anthropology and sociology, so it was kind of an interdisciplinary program. And they were two of the professors. And then I took courses from them and then after I had been there for about two years, actually, Leary did the thing when during his vacation he discovered accidentally, unknowingly, stumbled across the ancient Mexican magic mushroom, so called magic mushroom, and then his life was changed by that. He had life changing experiences and he kept talking about it and he initiated a series of research projects on psilocybin, a synthetic equivalent of the magic mushroom, which had only recently been identified and which nobody knew anything about. And so Harvard initiated... Leary and Albert and a group of other graduate students – about a dozen or more graduate students – initiated a series of projects on psilocybin.

**Dr. Dave:** And so were you involved in any of that research?

**Ralph Metzner:** Yes. I was one of about half dozen or so graduate students. And one of the two main projects... well the basic thing was what we called a naturalistic study where we were giving questionnaires to relatively sophisticated people, not undergraduates. We didn't want to use undergraduates and we didn't but graduate students and ordinary people, artists and writers and people that had some history of exploring their consciousness. And designed questionnaires and give it to them and then we did the study on the prison rehabilitation, working with convicted prisoners. That was part of the study that I worked on with several other students where we were giving psilocybin... The idea of giving convicted criminals an insight kind of experience, an insight into themselves and then see... because there was a behavioral index... Harvard was very big on behavior in those days and Skinner was, you know, one of the main people and so... The behavioral index would be the recidivism rate: could we reduce the recidivism rate, the rate at which people... prisoners return into a new prison for new

crimes after they've been released from prison. And so that was a project that I was involved in. And Leary's insight I think and really genius in that was to recognize that you couldn't just do this. This was not a drug that automatically changed people's behavior. It wasn't like that. It was a drug that provided an experience from which insights and behavior changes could result if the set and the setting was correct, was right in that direction. "Set and setting" that was his formula that he found and that's been accepted in the field. The intention that you bring to it and the setting or the context. And so that's... And so then what we also did was... what he also insisted on, I think correctly, was that you couldn't just give the prisoners a drug and observe their behavior. That was not the right model because there's no behavior to observe! The drug produces an experience. And the only way to get that experience is to ask the person what they are experiencing. So... And Leary insisted right away that you can't – like he used to joke, you know – you give a person a psychedelic drug and there's no behavior to observe! They might just sit there or lay there and every now and then explain: "Oh! That's amazing!" or "That's incredible!".

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) right or "Wahoo!"

**Ralph Metzner:** And there's no behavior you see because everything is happening inside.

**Dr. Dave:** Sure

**Ralph Metzner:** The only way you know what's going on is to ask the person... And then of course the experimenter, the so-called person giving the drug, has to have had the experience himself. They don't have to take it at the same time. You have to have had the experience otherwise he has no clue, absolutely zero idea of what might be going on with the person unless you've experienced it yourself. You won't do it. And that's a fact! That's a fact that's widely accepted in the field to this day. I mean... There are research projects now going on with the psilocybin and LSD and all of these other drugs. But, to a person, all the researchers who were doing them have themselves experienced the drug.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** They're not allowed to say that in their scientific publications. And they're supposed to pretend they're behaviorists

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Ralph Metzner:** and not involved and da da da da da... But it's a known fact that they all, to a person, have... and they don't write about that experience in the write ups of the experiments. So it was kind of an interesting situation, and not like any other drug.

**Dr. Dave:** Well two questions that come up for me. One is I want to, you know, find out what your experience was with psilocybin since you've just pointed out that was an important qualification. But also how those studies turned out in terms of what you learned so... You can start with whichever one you want.

**Ralph Metzner:** I don't actually talk about my experience in public anymore. I felt that as a researcher that's not necessary. I've had enough experiences to know what the general space is like and I do and I've done in the past studies with people where we asked people and collect data from experiences, comparing experiences under different conditions, so naturalistic study that involves of course introspection and questionnaire studies and stuff like that, and systematizing and we conducted several studies and published papers in the literature. The two main projects at Harvard that I concentrated on was this study with convicted criminals giving them psilocybin and, in the prison, there was a group of us, graduate students, and also the prisoners and because of Leary's commitment to having this be a collaborative research project, not experimenter and subject which is a hierarchical relationship, you know, the experimenter and the subject.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Ralph Metzner:** We say subject and the experimenter is doing something to the subject.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes.

**Ralph Metzner:** And so, Leary said - he had this belief in existential transactional kind of thing - "this is a collaborative research project", we gave the substance to the prisoners, we took it with them! We took it with them and this is where all the critics said : "You're completely mad, these are dangerous criminals, all this kind of violence will come out". Well this was complete nonsense. There was not a single moment of

violence in those studies. And we, you know, I had half a dozen or more and also fellow graduate students and friends of mine in a prison, in a maximum security prison.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** Because we would take... we would have a group of prisoners, a group of graduate students, half the students, half the prisoners, half of the total group would take psilocybin in the morning and the other half would be assisting, observing, helping, being there, talking, and then in the afternoon we would switch around and so everybody would have both the experience of sitting with and/or experiencing subjectively. And we collected data and interviews and questionnaires and so forth. And we looked at the recidivism rate. Now the recidivism rate data were not convincing because there's so many factors entering into how and whether a convicted criminal will return to prison after he's been released. He has to have some kind of follow up, halfway house, da da da... job search, all those kind of things. We couldn't prove that just having one or more, you know, three or four experiences with psilocybin would change a convict into a Buddha, which was kind of Leary's simplistic formula at the time. But he was an Irish joke stirrer, you know

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** What kind of changes... We gave personality tests like the California CPI before and after, and interviews, and Rorschach and all those kind of things and follow up after six months, and five years and twenty years later there were follow up. Though people generally have said that was the most profound life changing experience, we weren't just able to demonstrate it by behavioral indices. But that's true of this kind of research in general. It's not a drug therapy when we have a placebo control... it's not a placebo control thing. This is not the appropriate model for that kind of research. So that was one of the studies that we did in Harvard and the other study, which actually was a double blind placebo controlled study, was... Walter Pahnke was getting his Ph.D. in religions. He already had a theology degree and an M.D., he was an M.D., and so he did a study which we participated in and collaborated with as research assistants, on what was called the Good Friday study, maximizing the set and the setting. These were Divinity students and the service was held in a chapel on Good Friday, in 1963 or 2 or something like that. And so the set and setting was all to maximize religious experience and Walter Pahnke gave them interviews and questionnaires on mystical experiences before and after. He did have a placebo double blind control studies in other words half

the people got the placebo which was a ridiculous ritual because after, you know, twenty minutes everybody knew who had the placebo or the psilocybin. Those who got the placebo were kind of pissed off because they missed out on the experience!

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) That's funny! Yeah, I remember Walter Pahnke

**Ralph Metzner:** That's the kind of ritualistic thing that you supposedly have to do.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. What was your doctoral dissertation on?

**Ralph Metzner:** Oh! My doctoral dissertation was on something completely different. Because the chairman of the department David McClelland said to those of us who were working with Tim Leary and Alpert that we couldn't do... because he was opposed to... he was a behaviorist himself so he didn't think that we should study these experiences by taking the substance ourselves.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. So did you suffer at all...

**Ralph Metzner:** He said: "No, you can't do your Ph.D., you've got to do your Ph.D. on something else". So I did it on something else with Walter Mischel who was another professor there and then continued to work on the project in my spare times, so to speak.

**Dr. Dave:** So just out of curiosity, what was the something else that you worked on?

**Ralph Metzner:** It was on this idea of delaying gratification. It was on educational psychology. Walter Mischel was a person there who had developed this simple methodology for seeing how the ability to delay gratification, you know, where: "Will a child learn to forgo an immediate reward for the sake of a larger reward later on?"

**Dr. Dave:** Ah! That really was what you were doing on the side that seems to have shaped your subsequent career.

**Ralph Metzner:** You know, that's what we were interested in.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** The stuff with the consciousness expanding substances which is what we called them and which incidentally is a term that Leary came up with which I now think I want to come back to. I prefer that term "consciousness expanding" to the term "psychedelic" because the term psychedelic has a crude all kind of other, sort of cultural, associations. Like paisley colors and swirling blah blah, like that.... You know my daughter when she was nine years old on time said: "Oh! Look at that psychedelic bla da da da", you know... And that's not the most significant aspect of a psychedelic experience. The most significant aspect is that it gives you insight into the way your mind works.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Ralph Metzner:** Given an appropriate set and setting. Of course, if you do, if your setting is that you're taking it at a rave dance or at a rock concert, well, then it won't necessarily give you any insight into how your mind works. It might. But it's kind of... it all depends on the set and setting where the drug is simply a catalyst or an amplifier. Some people call it a nonspecific amplifier of perception. So it doesn't produce an effect. It's not like : "Take this drug and have this effect".

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Was there any fallout for you in you academic career by dent of your association with Leary and Alpert or did you manage to escape that?

**Ralph Metzner:** Well academic fallout I mean...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. That's what I meant, academic fallout

**Ralph Metzner:** Well no because... We did the project at Harvard for... I finished my Ph.D., I wasn't fired from Harvard, I even had a job at Harvard

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, right

**Ralph Metzner:** You know, I finished my Ph.D. and then I did a postdoctoral fellowship in psychopharmacology and we continued to work on the different projects even after Harvard, you know, stopped the projects under Harvard hospices. But Leary and Alpert and about a dozen other colleagues and friends and other graduate students, people not from the university, collaborated. Leary started working a lot with artists and writers and poets, people like Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and musicians of various kinds...

artists that would be... have expected from their lifestyle and their basic orientation to have an interest in expansion of consciousness. And working with them, collecting data all the time, keep doing interviews, questionnaires, talking to people, how... Because he kind of recognized that this was completely new experiences. There was nothing, absolutely nothing in our personal background or in our reading or in the study of psychology on anybody's part, Leary's, Alpert's, mine, Frank Barron's, the Harvard professors, nobody! Nobody had any clue that such a thing could exist as a mushroom, or a substance of some kind you know... LSD had been discovered in the mid 40's and so there were some adventurous psychiatrists who had started using it and of course the CIA and the military were using it for brainwashing blah blah blah blah. But it was not in any sense at all in the main stream. It's often very hard to get that. Nowadays you say LSD and there's all kind of associations in people's mind but in those days, early in the 60's, you could have said LSD, XYZ or IBM, that meant nothing!

**Dr. Dave:** right

**Ralph Metzner:** No association whatsoever, nor good or bad, legal or illegal. Totally legal, everything was completely legal. We weren't breaking any laws! The laws were made afterwards you see!

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** So I had that experience twice now in my life because I was doing some research, getting really good results, nobody was harmed, nobody was complaining. None of the people who had the experiences was complaining on the contrary they wanted to have more of them and then, all of a sudden, by some other political means way beyond my control, all of this is now criminal, you're now a criminal, if you continue to do what you're doing, you go to jail

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** And then the same thing happened later on in the 80's, twenty years later with ecstasy or MDMA.

**Dr. Dave:** Right

**Ralph Metzner:** Which was a fantastically valuable, interesting, constructive therapy



substance, actually better for therapy in many ways than LSD or psilocybin and the same thing happened. You know, after using it I myself with a couple of hundred therapists in the United States and Europe were using it with really good results, fantastic results ,for things like trauma and depression and things like that and through various political processes... Because the drug experience kind of escape from the academic framework and lots of people wanted to take the drug!

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** And they didn't wanna go and be somebody's research subject. They didn't want to be somebody's research patient or psychiatric patient when you know maybe from the adventurous psychiatrist they would get it... because they just wanted to get it because they thought it was valuable, they had heard it was valuable... And it was valuable!

**Dr. Dave:** And there was a big spread I recall in those years, I think in in Life magazine or Look magazine something like that, I think that's one of the first places that I heard about it, and of course it ignited a fire and interest... "Oh! This sounds very fascinating... As a psychologist I need to know about this!".

**Ralph Metzner:** Exactly! Exactly! Psychologists... you know Leary is often blamed for popularizing the drugs this is absurd! He would not... He was like a Harvard professor, who would pay any attention to what he's saying? And then we were accused of giving the drug to undergraduates, that's ridiculous! Undergraduates were giving us drugs! They had more access to drugs than we did!

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Ralph Metzner:** I remember an undergraduate turned me on to marijuana, I had no idea what it was... they were able to get mescaline and all kinds of dugs and they were often much more sophisticated... And anyway that was not what we were doing. We were not trying to sell... we were not selling anything! We were reporting. These are findings that... we were like explorers! We were like people who had gone to South America and, you know, found the Amazon jungle and all these tribes and their culture and their art and all these various things and came back and said "Whoa!", you know, there's this all other continent! There's this all other continent! Like Marco Polo, you know, who first came back from China into the 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy and people said "Oh!

You're making it up!", you know, "There's no such thing as these Chinese! You're fantasizing!". They didn't believe them! See for yourself, we're not making it up!

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah! Well of course, later, Leary did turn into more of a salesman when I was at the University of Michigan, he came and really preached the "turn on, tune it, drop out" method...

**Ralph Metzner:** Yeah! I mean he advocated, you could say he advocated... I mean he was not a salesman, he would have never sold the drugs. He never sold any drug, he never profited from any drug...

**Dr. Dave:** Right

**Ralph Metzner:** In fact as a result of being associated with drugs he spent you know three and a half years in jail, different jails, so... He paid a heavy price for his advocacy

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** he was a spokesperson, and his idea "turn on, tune it, drop out" actually was meant metaphorically it didn't necessarily mean turn on by taking a drug, it meant "turn on to the potentials of your mind!". Tune in meant to "tune in to what's going on in your mind" just don't get that automatically by taking the drug and dropping out didn't necessarily mean "quit your job and leave on the streets" but drop out of your psychological commitment to the ideology of the culture and question... I actually like his later slogan better... "Learn to use you mind"... "Use your head", "Drop out of your mind and learn to use your head!"... But he was an irish man and he was a satirist, he was in the tradition of people like Jonathan Swift and George Bernard Shaw, and James Joyce... He'd like to provoke people into thinking differently! Or in the native american tradition there's the concept of a trickster. See a trickster figure is like coyote. It's somebody who teaches you by tricking you out of your ego trips.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** He doesn't say: "This is the way it is and this is what you should do and this is what you shouldn't do".... because then, you know, we do all our ego trips and blablabla... And he doesn't want you to follow him. That's the thing. Leary used to get really pissed off and say all kind of bad words when people treated him like a guru.

He'd say: "Don't give me any of that guru shit, I'm not a guru. I'm just... I'm a fellow explorer and explore your mind and use it!". And of course he made mistakes and of course he said stupid things, who doesn't? I've said...

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Ralph Metzner:** mistakes and said things I regretted later... but to say that he caused a lot of people to drop out is ridiculous. People dropped out because they wanted to.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** And lots of people dropped in. You look at this book that Ram Dass and I recently published about four years ago called Birth of a Psychedelic Culture, I don't know if you've had a chance to look at that?

**Dr. Dave:** I have

**Ralph Metzner:** We have a conversation about Harvard years and Leary and then we have reports for about ten or a dozen other people, and these are like... in one way or another marginally or centrally involved with our projects. These are all like... these are family people, these have families, they haven't dropped out, they have Ph.D.s, they are teaching in universities, they work in businesses, they work in all kinds of fields and arts and they're the opposite of dropped out. They were not hippies, they might have put on some hippy clothes in the 60's but that's not the point, you know. Profound changes occurred in their lives and the fact is that the psychedelic subculture exists. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of people taking these substances on their own whether the government consider them illegal or not. And they take a risk in doing that. And the risk is that they'll be found out, you know, in some context of selling drugs so they have to be underground. They have to be underground. Not... So that's why I don't like the counterculture because it's an underground culture. That's underground. I mean it's hidden. But it's not a counterculture, it's not opposed to the mainstream culture. It's just... you know, people often have this strange thing that they don't actually like to go to jail! They'd rather not, they'd rather be free you know and they have some interest, interests that are not approved by the mainstream culture. And so they keep quiet about those interests.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. That can really complicate the experience, I mean... You know, if you're

on LSD or some other mind-expanding substance and realize that you're now an enemy of the state with all of its resources and they could come breaking down your door...

**Ralph Metzner:** Yes! That's right! And it gets even more interesting... I wouldn't say "an enemy of the state", the people who wanted to drop out, the hippies, they weren't opposed to the state, see, that's what I said, that's why counterculture is not the right word, I mean, except as a kind of a counterpoint maybe, like a musical counterpoint, you know, questioning the assumptions of the mainstream culture, not wanting to over... not wanting to be revolutionary, not wanting to overthrow the government, you see... In the 1960's there were groups that resorted to violence, we all know that, the minute men and various...

**Dr. Dave:** Sure

**Ralph Metzner:** Other groups that resorted to violent means. As far as I know in the drug culture, counterculture it tends to be nonviolent if you think of the typical... Marijuana, for example, sociologists have studied drug use, they compare alcohol subculture and marijuana subculture, and alcohol subculture is much more violent. Hands down! No comparison!

**Dr. Dave:** Right

**Ralph Metzner:** Alcohol lifts inhibition to violence! You know the typical drunk hangs around, swears, is indecent, makes a fool of himself and causes accidents while driving drunk. The typical pot user just sits back somewhere and wants to get high, they don't wanna drive anywhere

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** listen to music or something.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** Of course I'm not advocating they should drive! Of course not! Nobody should drive on anything under altered states of consciousness!

**Dr. Dave:** Right

**Dr. Dave:** I've heard that the FDA has begun to loosen up a bit and there's beginning to be legitimate research on psychedelics again and you made some reference to that. Can you share with us anything that you're aware of in terms of any researchers that you may be in contact with or whose work you know, you know they are currently doing that kind of work?

**Ralph Metzner:** Yeah. Well I think one of the most significant studies that's going on now is on MDMA which is actually a kind of different drug, it's also popularly known as ecstasy or now it's called "molly" as a street drug. It's used... people use it in raves and dances and so forth. But originally it was discovered as a... in the 80's when... used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. And it's interestingly different from other drugs like psilocybin and LSD in the sense that it doesn't cause you any visions whatsoever, it doesn't change your perception. What it does it produces a kind of opening of the heart center, opening of emotional empathy, and I call them empathogenic, generating a state of empathy, easily and effortlessly for oneself and for others. And that's kind of the essence of psychotherapy when you think about it. You wanna have empathy. And particularly the application where it's found the most use is in the treatment of trauma, PTSD, whether produced in accidents or in war and war trauma and so forth. And there's very vry significant research that's been done. Because the traumatized individual is in a state of contracted consciousness where they're kind of hyper alert and hyper energized to the slightest stimuli. That's why you have these stories of these veterans that come back from the war and they hear a strange sound and they would put their machine gun and mow down everybody who's standing there including family and children because it triggers this kind of post traumatic stress reaction automatically. So with a person like that you don't really want to give them LSD or psilocybin that would not be appropriate because then they would be hallucinating even more you see. It's a dissociated response. So ecstasy or MDMA has this amazing capacity to completely turn off the stress mechanisms in the person. So there's no anxiety. People don't have bad trips with it. Unlike with LSD people could have bad trip, they could hallucinate their own inner monsters or whatever their own unconscious hid, feelings, and fears, and so forth. This doesn't happen. It turns off the fear response and produces a response that's like the response of the nursing infant who's like in the bosom of his or her mother. The nursing infant, the infant-mother bonding response. Prolactin and oxytocin, these are hormones of nursing. And so the person feels totally safe, and that's the environment you need to have in order to look in trauma. So in the therapy of trauma whether in war or in

accident or in anything like that the person who's using the substance is allowed to and is able to look at the traumatic, you know, stimuli that they remember and without reactivating the memories. So I edited a collection of MDMA experiences called Through the Gateway of the Heart and there are many examples in there of people who were able to... and traumatized veterans or other people, you know, and there's 350000 veterans from various wars like Vietnam, and going back to Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan or wherever, who were not treatable you know they're given tranquilizers which kind of pepper over, it's not really therapeutic, forever. They may be wounded physically as well. So this is one of the most promising areas of research. And so the organization called Maps is soliciting funds and maybe... and there are several government approved research projects going on where they do the studies and the safety studies...

**Dr. Dave:** Do you recall where those studies are happening?

**Ralph Metzner:** The easiest way to find out is to go to the website of the group called Maps which is a kind of coordinating group that raises funds and writes about all the different projects and some are in the University of North Carolina. Maps.org I think

**Dr. Dave:** Is it Maps or Maaps?

**Ralph Metzner:** No Maps. Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.org. And there you'll see all of the different studies that they're doing. And they of course, they organize getting the permission from the various government agencies, FDA, DEA... all the different bureaucratic places, but then also, the research is not funded by any government agency so they have to raise the money from private funding to actually carry out these studies. And then that still doesn't mean the drug is actually available for treatment for anybody...

**Dr. Dave:** Right

**Ralph Metzner:** It's a weird situation you see because there's these hundreds of thousands of traumatized people and they hear about these studies and they basically, they can't get the medicine. The ordinary person can't get the medicine. Except! Because of the underground in fact they can! In fact they can get the medicine because there's hundreds of thousands maybe several million people who actually have taken and maybe continue to take that same drug under the different name of ecstasy or Molly or whatever at raves and, you know, it's relatively safe, it's not a controlled setting of

course but there aren't like thousands of corpses lying around anywhere. These people are just taking it and they're just selling LSD. It's easier for you or me just as street persons to get that drug than it is for a researcher to be able to get it.

**Dr. Dave:** How do we know about the purity of the drug though when we turn to street drugs?

**Ralph Metzner:** Well you don't! That's the problem. On the street drugs you don't. Except that there are some voluntary organizations at the raves and dances there are some volunteer organizations that set up testing for purity but basically you don't. That's the consequence of the prohibitionist culture, you see. We have a prohibitionist culture that makes the obtaining of these drugs therapeutically, psychologically very very interesting, positive, more positive than any other treatment of trauma and inexpensive and you don't have to have special training. You don't have to have a Ph.D. or a MD or anything like that. In fact there are self help support groups because veterans, lots and lots and lots of veterans have been traumatized, lots of veterans have themselves access to these various drugs. And in fact it's sort of analogous to the AA model. There is a growing movement of veterans who have been traumatized who have access or have been able to access ecstasy and then who can then help others, their buddies who actually... So they're actually in a better position to help their buddies than say a doctor might be because they've had the experience. This is like the AA, ex-alcoholics helping the current alcoholics, you see.

**Dr. Dave:** I had not heard of that movement. What about ayahuasca?

**Ralph Metzner:** You won't hear about it you see. But you were asking me about... ayahuasca is interesting too but before I go on to that... you were asking me about the two most interesting applications I think of the psychedelic drugs in general, so I think ecstasy or MDMA, the treatment of trauma is one. And the other one is psilocybin or LSD in the treatment of death anxiety. And death is a trauma and the anxiety about death is a trauma event that affects everybody not just veterans... Everybody without exception has a certain amount of fear of death, you see. And it's very interesting that studies have been done with psilocybin and LSD, in fact the famous writer Aldous Huxley, you know, took LSD at the time when he was actually dying... But studies have been done and they are approved studies by the FDA and DEA, which is very interesting, where psilocybin... Charles Grob is a psychiatrist, a friend of mine at UCLA, and some others in Switzerland have done these studies... but people who had been given a medical

diagnosis of a terminal diagnosis, in other words "you have 3 months to live, you have cancer blablabla, there's no cure" and the research is approved that they can be given psilocybin to alleviate end of life anxiety. In other words nobody's pretending. It's not gonna cure the cancer, it's not gonna stop them from dying. But to alleviate the anxiety around end of life. And that's a very beautiful thing because as a culture, as a whole, our culture does not deal with end of life issues very well at all. You know, we tend to outright deny it or pepper it over with... or drugging people out of it... This doesn't drug people out of it. This gives people a possibility of looking at it with compassion, with compassion for themselves and insight into the possibility of what is consciousness after death, what does death really mean... like that... Because these substances, and nobody who wants to understand these substances will get anywhere unless they recognize that these substances can not be approached from a purely behaviorist point of view. They have spiritual implications.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** And they have mental effects and emotional effects and physical effects. But also, and at its core, it's a spiritual experience or it can be. Not guaranteed. It depends on the set and the setting.

**Dr. Dave:** Ayahuasca, I've heard, can often lead to sort of profound sort of death experience. What are your observations about ayahuasca?

**Ralph Metzner:** Yeah, I mean, I collected experiences, I've written a book on ayahuasca and one on the mushroom which is basically a collection of experience accounts and scientific chapters. So both scientific chapters looking at the botany, the chemistry, the pharmacology and then the experiences, you know, so both the inner and the outer sciences. And so... yes it comes out of these shamanic cultures like the mushrooms do, similarly, widespread South America, and mushrooms Central America and so forth that have age old, centuries old traditions of connecting to spirits. And in those cultures these substances... these cultures have a completely different world view. They exist in a different world than we do. For them spirits is an ever present reality. Everywhere. Spirits before, after death, before death. Spirits in everyday life... Spirits in the family. Everything is... every plants, animals, humans, the environment, everything is full of spirits. World are spirits. You see to the western minds these are like hallucinations or imaginings. To the people in those cultures it's not imaginings at all! To them spirits are as real as to us other human beings are real.



**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** Sometimes more real. And so drug, plant induces visions as well as dreams or spontaneous visions are equally real! The reality depends... it depends! There are multi level, multidimensional, they live in a multidimensional world with spirits of many different levels of reality. And the common feature in the cultures that use ayahuasca and mushrooms and other cultures that use various other substances or no substances at all is the recognition of the reality of intelligent spirits that have their own reality and communicate in their own way and can communicate and interact with people. So when people take ayahuasca it's not the drug that's doing something, the drug is in some way triggering a connection with the spiritual world. And so then the people may actually see the spirits and they feel the spirits working in them, in their body, in their gut, purging some of toxic material. And ayahuasca is a peculiar thing because it helps people purge. And you'd think how does a drug that makes people throw up become so popular?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah really

**Ralph Metzner:** And my theory about it is that people feel very toxic, you see... And the literature bombards us with the toxicity in our environment, with the scientists that tell us that the water, the air, the rivers, the earth, everything is toxic! The food! Everything is toxic! And we feel toxic, not only physically but emotionally toxic. Emotional toxicity, everything like rage and anxiety and criticism and da da da... And people feel with ayahuasca it's very visible toxic... Similar things can happen with LSD and psilocybin but it's not so obvious. The person throws up and immediately afterwards they feel fantastic! So it's not like throwing up when you're sick. You throw up and then you feel fantastic like you've been liberated from this toxic thing inside of you. And that's very convincing. Now it's not necessarily prominent because then you go back to your life and you still have to make the changes. That's true of all psychedelic. They give you kind of an experience of what it's like not to have these toxic conflicts, conflicting ideas and difficult illusions or ideas, and then you still have to go back and live your ordinary life in your family and your job and your place and da da da, and work things out. So it's not a magical solution that makes everything go away and it's roses, roses after that!

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Then one thing that I maybe want to reach out to you at this particular time is the sea change in relation to the legalization of marijuana.

**Ralph Metzner:** Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** Just this past week Colorado has legalized marijuana for recreational use.

**Ralph Metzner:** Right.

**Dr. Dave:** On the news we hear that many states are following their experiment very closely, obviously with hopes of high tax revenues and if all goes well in Colorado, you know, they want to follow suit. CNN has carried some very interesting major reports from the likes of Dr Sanjay Gupta and Anderson Cooper. And so I'd like to focus on those to some extent in terms of what you see as the value of both medical and recreational and spiritual uses of marijuana.

**Ralph Metzner:** Yeah marijuana or cannabis, you know, Cannabis sativa, Cannabis indica is a wonderful ancient medicinal therapeutic and sort of spiritual plant as well. It has all those strands in its spectrum of actions, see. That's one of the things about plant medicine, or fungal medicine as well, in comparison to drugs. See, modern medical systems like to have a specific drug for a specific symptom and everything else is a side effect. Plants and mushrooms and natural products don't actually work that way and the body doesn't work that way, it is not segmented like that. Everything has multiple effects and marijuana, the effects of cannabis on the body and the mind and the emotions, there are hundreds and hundreds of specific effects! It's a multi-systemic plant medicine, extremely non-toxic, there's never been a single death attributed to marijuana smoking. You can't smoke that much marijuana that it would be toxic. It's like a ton! You'd have to smoke a ton and it can't be done! Unlike many of the other drugs that psychiatrists prescribe all the time! People are overdosing on these things all the time! You know... And have these horrendously toxic effects from it. This is another case of a very powerful, ancient, historical medicine with amazingly... certain forms of cannabis have cured certain kinds of cancer! Cured! Not just alleviated the pain but actually cured the cancer! That's in the published literature!

**Dr. Dave:** Really?

**Ralph Metzner:** Yes! In the 70's, already, in the psychiatric literature, certain kinds of cancer. It's an Israeli chemist, scientist, who basically was the one who identified THC, the tetrahydrocannabinol as the chemical ingredient in the cannabis plant. But there are

many different ingredients and now some other researchers are exploring some other ones: cannabidiol which also has some amazingly interesting therapeutic effects and doesn't have the psychoactive effects, for example. So... appetite stimulating, various kinds of different anti-contracting, pain and difficulty... So, the way the Israeli researcher formulates it: it first of all stimulates appetite so the main application that's found legal permission is in the treatment of the AIDS wasting system, syndrome, when people with AIDS, their immune system is compromised and they don't have any appetite and they can't take anything in. This stimulates appetite and relieves some of the symptoms. And then it allows people to... so it stimulates appetite, it helps people relax, it helps people forget stresses! As a psychologist, I always thought it's better to remember than to forget... but it's not necessarily so! Because if you think about how every day, you know, we have thousands or dozens or hundreds of situations where we get stressed, have an argument or an accident or we get hurt or we get confused da da da... and arguments with your husband, your wife, your friend, your job boss, your colleague whatever... you don't want to be able to remember all those kinds of things. So it stimulates the appetite, it helps you to forget the stress of everyday life and it helps you to sleep, it's tranquilizing and it produces pleasure, it's actually pleasure inducing, what a concept you see!

**Dr. Dave:** Right! (laughs)

**Ralph Metzner:** Sitting, smoking pot and laughing! Now let's compare that to alcohol. Alcohol doesn't necessarily produce laughing. It might produce like jokes about people doing stupid things with alcohol or, you know, it loosens your inhibitions so you do more aggressive and stupid things or aggressing like drive your car in a stupid aggressive way. The pot smoker is not so likely to drive his car. And the toxic effects from alcohol are too well known to... you know... it's not even close comparison... thousands and thousands of deaths every year!

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah! The thing that interests me about some of these TV news stories I've seen on medical marijuana, and it relates to what you've been saying, is that there are all these different strands that they've developed, each with very specific properties. Back in the days I smoked, not a whole lot, but I smoked marijuana, you know, as a street thing, but this is kind of a new era, this isn't like your daddy street grass of yesteryear, but they are these very specific strands for very specific uses...

**Ralph Metzner:** Yes, well that's the way medicine is, you know, it wants to have the

specific remedy for a specific illness and that's OK! That's at one level, that research will probably continue and it will be more and more widespread but on the other hand at the cultural level, the people in Colorado... was it Colorado that made it legal?

**Dr. Dave:** Yes!

**Ralph Metzner:** They're not, you know, they're not getting it for medicinal value, they're getting it for recreational, and that's, from a cultural point of a view, it's a much more significant kind of thing, you see? I mean, of course we want people to have access to medicine, that need the medicine

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** But cultural approval that's sort of a very deep social cultural change. American culture as often has been pointed out is a very puritanical culture: they somehow suspect people who are doing something just for fun. It's somehow...

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Ralph Metzner:** "You should be doing something more serious. You can't be sitting there having fun."

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Ralph Metzner:** "It must be something wrong with you"...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

**Ralph Metzner:** "What are you thinking?" You know, "Why are you just sitting there thinking, not doing anything?"

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. You can't be accused of not doing anything. You've written a whole bunch of books and you sent me one of your books which is one of a series... And it's interesting that your books... from what I've seen... I'm generalizing from this one book but it's a slim volume, I think it's only about 85 pages but it is packed with information and wisdom and it covers kind of a sweep lot of history with great economy I must say

**Ralph Metzner:** Well thank you. I have a nonprofit organization if I might just say that, it's called the Green Earth Foundation, so the website is [greenearthfound.org](http://greenearthfound.org), and I've just finished writing over the past three years, four years, a series of seven short books like a hundred pages plus or minus ten or twenty each and in which I sort of summarize, condense, synthesize, research and work that I've been doing over the last – my own and that of other people – over the past fifty years actually... I started in this field of consciousness expanding substances, which is what we called them, in 1961, so that's more than fifty years. And so the various applications of that, and the implications of that for our world view, for our understanding of the mind... not necessarily always tied to drugs... I mean, drugs are one... certain drugs are one very powerful method of changing consciousness but then there are many others and many traditions, for example, the traditions of yoga and meditation which are equally profound and produce changes also but different kinds... So what kind of thing is it that consciousness is? What's the role of consciousness or different states of consciousness, different dimensions of consciousness? It's very elusive, you see, the scientists, and of course scientists in the West tend to focus on the neuroscience, the brain and the nervous system and, yes, that's totally appropriate but all of consciousness cannot just be reduced to brain function. There's much more to consciousness than just the brain! And the brain is sort of the physical substrate but consciousness... we live in a multidimensional universe that has physical and mental and emotional and spiritual dimensions and you cannot get a complete picture unless you consider all these dimensions. And that's always been true and will always be true.

**Dr. Dave:** Do you think you would have been as open to that concept had you not had those early experiences with psilocybin and other substances?

**Ralph Metzner:** Oh no! Completely not!

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Ralph Metzner:** I had PTSD when I was at Harvard! I was traumatized as a child by war. I lived in Germany in 19... I was born in Germany in 1936 so...

**Dr. Dave:** Oh my goodness!

**Ralph Metzner:** I experienced the Second World War in Germany. So I experienced bomb dropping and the complete break down of society. I was traumatized and I didn't

know it! That's the thing about PTSD. You're traumatized, you don't know such a thing... what that is! You think this is just reality especially if you have never known anything else! As a war child you don't know anything else! I was completely withdrawn into myself, I lived in a shell, I could barely talk! My parents took me to a psychiatrist to find out "why isn't he talking?". And then, you know, I experienced psilocybin, the synthetic ingredient of the mushrooms at Harvard when I was 25 so... twenty years basically, the course of twenty years I lived in a shell and my first experience with psilocybin was like opening up: "Oh! There's another whole world!"

**Dr. Dave:** Yes

**Ralph Metzner:** There's a wonderful world beyond the world that I thought was the real world! It's like a small fragment.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Ralph Metzner:** That's the classic experience I've been reported many many times by people like Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Tim Leary himself, Huston Smith... many many other philosophers. And of course they can be experienced with other... it's not necessarily only with drugs, it can be had by mystics and many other people in many other ways...

**Dr. Dave:** Well that may be a good place for us to wrap it up unless there's anything else that you want to add?

**Ralph Metzner:** No, that's good. Yeah maybe remind people again I have this Green Earth Foundation and you could go to the website [greenearthfound.org](http://greenearthfound.org) and there's a newsletter I have, there's the website and talks that I give and these books that are available there too.

**Dr. Dave:** I definitely will put a link in the show notes and definitely let people know about that. So Dr Ralph Metzner I want to thank you for being my guest on Shrink Rap Radio

**Ralph Metzner:** Thank you for inviting me. I appreciate it.

**Dr. Dave:** Well first of all I must confess to being very impressed by Dr Metzner's

academic credentials. As you heard me say, we've moved around the same circles more or less for quite a few years and to me he's always just been Ralph or Ralph Metzner. Now I learn that he did his undergraduate work at Oxford University and his doctoral work at Harvard. And of course he was at Harvard during those culturally critical years of Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert. Personally I think that LSD/psychedelic period made an important and lasting impression on our culture. It will come at no surprise to my regular listeners that I'm in strong agreement with Dr Metzner as well as Leary and Alpert about the potentially positive psychotherapeutic and spiritual uses of mind-expanding substances. I do think that they can bring about the kind of conversion experience, if you will, that can change the direction of a person's life. Certainly they've had that effect on Dr Metzner as well as Leary and Alpert and myself along with hundreds of thousands of others. I don't know if I'm underestimating or overestimating when I say hundreds of thousands but, at any rate, let's say large numbers. It's always difficult to know about the paths not taken but it seems to me very likely that had I not had the psychedelic experiences that I did have in the past, Shrink Rap Radio would have a very different orientation and feel overall and that's if it existed at all. We only touched briefly on Dr Metzner's extensive writings. To give me some background for the interview, he was gracious enough to send me book number 6 in his series on the ecology of consciousness. He has a real gift for writing with great economy and clarity. I was very impressed by out deftly he was able to traverse great sweeps of history and thought in relatively few pages and I was equally impressed by the sheer quality of what he knows. Again Oxford and Harvard make a lot of sense in that regard. It's clear that he's a real scholar. He was born in Germany and so he's got that part of the germanic temperament but without the bad writingness often that comes with that temperament. The book he sent me is titled "The six paths of destiny" and the notion is that we choose our incarnation and that we will tend to choose or focus upon one of the six paths he describes which are, and here's the first one: the artist, the storyteller, the poet and the musician. That's one. The second one is the builder, the organizer, the producer, the engineer. I guess we could refer to them as clusters. The third cluster is the explorer, the scientist, the seeker, the pioneer. The fourth one is the healer, the shaman, the therapist, and the peacemaker. The fifth one is the teacher, the historian, the social scientist, the journalist. The sixth is the warrior, the guardian, the reformer, the activist. And do you guess which one I identified with most? Of course I saw parts of myself in more than one. But the one that seems most likely for me was the healer, the shaman, the therapist, the peacemaker. I think the peacemaker is particularly central in my personality. I'm afraid my own psychedelic experiences have not opened me up so much as to persuade me of the idea that we choose our incarnations however. Not to mention

that there are multiple incarnations. But hey! What do I know? I'd love to discover that I'm wrong about this. By the way I hope at some point to get around to locating one or more of those who are currently researching the therapeutic value of mind-expanding substances. I guess it's not so much hard to locate but making the time to actually do the interviews. You'll find quite a few books by Ralph Metzner on Amazon and as always you can use the Amazon widget on our site should you decide to order one. In addition you can purchase books and other resources on his website at [www.greenearthfound.org](http://www.greenearthfound.org)