



Notes from the Ringdom

When a Jew Goes to Germany

Kenneth Ring

Just after returning to Connecticut in 1984 from a trip to the Far East, I received an invitation to speak at a conference in Germany. Germany! This was a country I had never thought to visit for reasons that will be obvious—it was on my verboten list. What Jew would not have strong feelings about Germany?

Still, I was tempted because the conference themes — birth, sex and death — were all of interest to me, and many of my new American and Tibetan friends in the consciousness movement would also be speakers or attending, and there were to be several notable European speakers participating as well. It seemed too good an event to miss, and yet...I would have to go to Germany.

I temporized and wrote the conference organizer that I would have to think about it, making up some polite excuses about possibly conflicting commitments. But after a while, I succumbed to the lure and, despite my reservations, I agreed to go.

The conference itself was scheduled for a week in August

somewhere in Bavaria near or in the Black Forest. A few days before the conference, after I had made all my reparations, I suddenly became very sick with something that was either the flu or pneumonia. (I wondered at the time whether the timing of my illness was influenced by psychogenic factors having to do with my ambivalence.) Anyway, I would have to cancel, and that was that.

It being too late to write (this being before the days of e-mail), I had to call the conference organizer, a man named Dieter. He could hear how sick I was when I called to give my regrets. However, he refused to accept them. Instead he told me simply and in exactly these words, "You must come."

When he spoke the phrase, he was not imploring me nor was he giving me an imperative ("you must come or else..."). It was as if he was saying to me, "You must come because it is spiritually necessary for you to be here." Honestly, this is exactly what I thought at the time, not afterward. He then quickly went on to say, "We will take care of you." This was a very direct, no frills conversation. Struck by his tone and manner on the phone, I told him I could not promise anything, but I would try.

When it came time to leave, I was still quite sick, but I decided to trust what Dieter had told me and take my chances. When I arrived, dog-tired and still ailing, in Frankfurt, some people—a married couple who would be going to the conference—picked me up at the airport and took me immediately to their home where they put me to bed and indeed "took care of me."

By the next day, somehow, despite my jet lag, I was feeling substantially better, and I drove down with the husband to the conference site itself, which was located in a small town—something like Todtmoos, although I'm not sure that's the right spelling—near the Black Forest.

Not long after I arrived, I met Dieter. Talk about an archetypically-looking Nazi! He was thin, had wispy blonde hair, sunken cheeks and a ghostly pallor. Really, he seemed like a spook, and even his accent gave me the creeps. Still, he was very warm and welcoming, and despite everything, I couldn't help liking him.

After that, I went into the main conference hall to check things out, and shortly afterward found myself talking to a German journalist, Michel, who told me he had wanted to interview me for a magazine he worked for. We agreed to do the interview itself some days later, but I noticed right away how at home I felt with him.

Eventually, there was some kind of pre-conference gathering that evening where the conference attendees were all seated at a series of rectangular tables. Since I was by then kind of hanging out with Michel, I sat with him and some other people, mostly Germans, whom he knew. In the immediate cluster of people I found myself with, I felt unusually at ease. In fact, the feeling of rapport was so striking as to be almost uncanny.

I soon learned the reason that I felt so strangely comfortable with my new colleagues. Sitting at that table that evening with those strangers who seemed somehow so warm and familiar to me, I quickly learned that several

of them had recently been experimenting with exactly the same drugs to which I had recently been introduced at Esalen, MDMA, now popularly known as Ecstasy, and ketamine. It was almost as if a bond of sorts had been unconsciously established between us because of our common experiences—even before we had become aware of them. So much so that it almost felt that we were like brothers and sisters in a way or at least spiritually kindred souls. I couldn't know then how much truth there was to be in that perception.

The conference started the next day and was very engrossing. Over the next few days, I had a lot of wonderful and stimulating encounters both with my previous friends and with some of the speakers I had hoped to meet there, but the deepest connections I was having were with this cluster of people I had met the first night. After that night, I would sometimes see them in a group context, but at other times, I would go off with one or another of them for a more extended conversation.

The day after my own talk, for example, Michel drove me to a restaurant away from the conference grounds so we could have some privacy and where he could tape record an interview with me. We decided to eat our lunch first and do the interview afterward — but the luncheon conversation was so absorbing to us that the interview itself was almost an afterthought.

Now, here's where it gets interesting. First, there was an obvious physical resemblance between Michel and me, even though he was about 15 years younger. But, second, it was clear from the way Michel described his childhood that we

had had very similar tastes and interests even as children. However, there came a point in Michel's life where he had made a critical decision that completely changed his life. A friend of his had been screwed by someone in a business deal and wanted to get even. This friend had induced Michel to help him, and the ultimate outcome was that Michel and his friend were apprehended in some kind of illegality and other mischief, and Michel went to prison because of it.

As he continued to talk (and I chimed in about my life), it occurred to both of us that we were like brothers, except whereas he had chosen a dangerous and wayward path in life, I had chosen a safe and conventional one. We looked at each other agape because here we were, so many years later with similar interests and similar tastes, if very different backgrounds, but feeling almost as if we had been brothers all along who had only now, through this chance set of circumstances been reunited. And, as you will see, Michel and I remained in touch for a long time afterward, too, and never lost this brotherly feeling for each other. The strange thing is that neither of us had had a brother in our lives, yet felt this sense of brotherhood between us almost as soon as we began to talk in earnest about our lives and the paths we had followed.

Another person in this group was Angela, a woman in her mid-thirties, who, like Michel, was a journalist but also was serving as a translator at this conference (which was conducted in English). She and Michel were friends, were in the same group of shamanistic voyagers, and had once, I think, been lovers, though Angela was then married to somebody else. I had a very strong connection with

Angela, too, and we also had some very soulful conversations during the conference, though they tended to be more light-hearted and playful at times.

As the conference progressed, it seemed to take on more the quality of celebration. Of course, during the days, there were the usual lectures and workshops, but in the evenings there were sometimes special events and entertainments, and soon enough, I realized, there were always parties. Not long after the conference began, I found myself going to the parties of the Germans (and not those of the Americans I already knew, who were partying elsewhere). Of course, although the conference was held in English, the German parties were not, and not having any German myself, I was completely clueless linguistically. But none of that seemed to matter. The Germans took to me readily — even the ones who weren't in that original cluster— and I felt very at home with them.

Again, there was this uncanny but yet unmistakable sense of belonging, or kindredness, and I had the best times at these parties, just soaking up the ambiance and good cheer. Once, I remember, I was sitting across from Angela at a small table with some other people, and she impulsively leaned across it and gave me a long, lingering kiss.

Another night, at one of these parties, I took a stroll outside with another one of the persons in the original group, a woman named Karin. Although Michel and Angela spoke perfect English (Angela's was even without an accent, as she had lived for a while in the States when growing up), Karin spoke only broken English, so our communications were sometimes a little tricky. Nevertheless, I found myself

telling her that I was a Jew (something that I hadn't mentioned to the others at that time), that I had had a very hard time deciding to come to the conference, etc., but that the experiences I had been having ever since I arrived had been extremely healing for me, and that my previous attitudes toward Germany had already begun to unravel. Karin didn't say anything. She just looked at me with deep compassion in her eyes, and then, without the least hint of anything erotic, she embraced me for a very long time.

The energy of this conference and everything I had been experiencing just continued to build as the end of the week drew near and my connection to these Germans grew stronger. On what was to be the last full day of the conference, Michel told me that that night a few of them had planned to gather to do a special ritual ceremony to mark the close of our week together. There would be eight of us — Karin, Angela, and Michel and several other people, including one American student of shamanism, who had married a German woman in this same crowd. The plan was to meet in Angela's room, which was the largest and the most commodious, and to do an evening-long ritual.

When we assembled, the American student of shamanism did a kind of purification ceremony, which took quite a while. After that, we all ingested MDMA, and a few hours later when the MDMA had reached its peak, we all took ketamine—a double drug session like the one I had experienced with Therese the year before, and, believe me, a very potent one. MDMA lasts about five hours, but ketamine is relatively quick in its action (it takes less than an hour to run its course), and for it, we all lay down in a large circle, holding hands. I remember Angela was on one

side of me and Karin was on the other for this last part of the evening ceremony, and as I had with L. and S. at Esalen, I could feel a sense of merging energies with Angela and Karin. It would be far too difficult to describe in detail the kind of inner experiences these drugs produced in me that night, so I won't even try. Let it suffice for me to say that they were very powerful and deeply bonding.

Eventually, however, the various people in our group (two of them were couples) drifted off to their own quarters, and in the end, I was there with my two closest companions, Angela and Michel. It was now about 3:30 in the morning, and just then the phone rang. Angela, startled, thought it might be her husband, checking up on her (they later did get a divorce). But, no, it turned out to be Dieter. He was calling to find out how we were doing.

It was then I learned that Dieter and his cohort had been having their own similar ritual in another room. After she hung up, Angela told Michel and me that Dieter wanted to come over to pay us a visit.

The odd thing is that after I had met Dieter at the beginning of the conference, I had scarcely seen him. Of course, he was busy with his conference duties, but he seemed never to be at the German parties I attended and he wasn't a part of the German clique that I had joined almost immediately.

I remember Dieter's entrance to our room vividly. Almost surely because of the effect of the drugs I had taken that night, I saw a golden haze around Dieter's body as he walked through the door. Whether this was actually his aura

or an artifact of my perception I have no way of knowing, but for whatever reason I was aware of it. The next thing was I heard Dieter call out my name, Ken, like a lover. I mean, it was like this—K...e...n, softly but with great feeling. As he intoned my name, he came over directly to me. I had been sitting on the floor, but I instinctively rose to greet him. Wordlessly, he extended his arms to me and drew me to him. A very long silent embrace ensued, and in

that embrace, Ken and Dieter disappeared. They no longer existed. Neither did Germans or Jews, men or women, or any particularities of personal identity at all. The only thing that was present was Love, a love that melted away all distinctions. In that embrace was summed up everything I had experienced at the conference, and in that gesture, I was finally healed of all my past harsh feelings about the Germans. Later I thought of Schiller's line, "One embrace for all the world."

The conference really culminated for me that night with that epiphany. Dieter had told me that I must come and that they would take care of me. How could I — how could he — have possibly known how necessary it was for me to be there and how prophetic his words would be?

There is an amusing coda to this story, though. The next day, somebody (I didn't know) was supposed to give me a ride back to some town where I was to catch a train to Frankfurt from where I would be departing for the U.S. But things got bollixed up and my ride never showed. What to do? No worries, said Michel, "I'll take you."

Now another thing about Michel that I didn't tell you earlier

is that he had already been in one very serious car wreck (it had killed his girlfriend at the time) and had told me he was still a somewhat reckless driver. And you know how they drive in Germany, anyway! Still, I had no fear, and I wound up having one of the most incredible car rides, over the back roads of Germany, at speeds that sometimes exceeded 120 mph, that I have ever had in my life. It was necessary to drive that fast for me to make my train, which I did with about ten minutes to spare. I never had any fear—only a sense of exhilaration—and afterward thought how appropriate that I should have this last ride from the conference with my daredevil brother.

I stayed in touch with all of these people for years afterward and visited them again a couple of times, when we once more did various drug trips together (sometimes with LSD, sometimes with ketamine), but one of my favorite subsequent experiences with hem occurred in California three years after that initial trip to Germany.

I was at another conference, this time in Santa Rosa, and was standing around in one of the halls between sessions talking to some friends. Suddenly, from behind, someone was hugging me. And I knew right away who it was! Yes, Dieter! I could tell immediately from his embrace, even though I couldn't see him, that it was he. It was unmistakable. He hadn't forgotten either.

Of course, I should add the obvious. I know the people I met at this conference were not "typical" of most Germans and that the circumstances under which I met them were exceptional, too. I don't mean to "generalize" anything from this set of experiences. All I can tell you is that,

however unusual these events were, I could not help but think they were somehow “orchestrated” to help me get over a longstanding emotional block when it came to Germany. And they did. I’ve felt differently ever since.

This, however, isn’t the end of my encounters with the Germans at that conference. A few years ago, I was to receive a most unexpected letter from another German I had briefly met there. And my subsequent relationship with him seems to me now to be the perfect and fitting capstone to the love that I experienced at that gathering.

At that conference I was very taken with some of the art that was on display, particularly with a mandala that had been painted by an orange-clad young German named Vinzent, who was then a follower of an Indian guru by

the name of Bhagwan Rajneesh. I loved Vinzent’s work and bought the painting on the spot. Afterward Vinzent had it sent to me, and it still hangs just few feet away from me in my office. But that was the last contact I had with Vinzent — for almost thirty years!

Then, one day, in 2014, I received an e-mail from him — out of the blue, as they say. Vinzent turned out not only to be a painter, but an astrologer, and he was asking my permission to include my astrological chart (he somehow seemed to know my birthday) in a book he was then thinking of writing. That letter initiated one of the most extraordinary and loving friendships I have ever had with a man. There was a kind of deep kinship between us that became apparent almost immediately, and it resulted in some

remarkable letters, at least on his part, about his work and his inner spiritual life. They led me to treasure this correspondence and to treasure him. Over the past five years we have exchanged many letters, the result of which is I have come to feel that, like Michel, Vincent, too, is a brother of mine, and certainly one that I very much cherish.

Sometimes, one can't help but think that there is a guiding benevolent force in our lives that orchestrates events that are designed to heal us and arranges things such that the people we are destined to meet appear at just the right time. It's not just the Lord that works in mysterious ways. It's the way Love works, too.

Comments for Ken about his blogs?

Please send them to Lisa Smartt at moodyslifeafterlife@gmail.com and I will forward them to him.

For those of who would like to read Ken's latest corona virus blogs, just go to this link: <https://www.kenringblog.com/>

Previous blogs can be found on the menu on the right. To read them in the order of their composition, click on March and then scroll down to the first blog in the series, "An NDE researcher ruminates about death..." and go down from there.