In *The Soul of the Story: Meetings with Remarkable People* David Zeller takes us on a journey through his life. This book is organized into short chapters that are each a teaching story about special people that taught Rabbi Zeller deep truths. He transmits these tales in a witty, thoughtful and warmhearted style that illuminates Kabalistic Jewish mysticism set in a universal transpersonal context.

Rabbi Zeller’s life story reflects that of his generation. Those of us who have been on a path of spiritual growth and inquiry will see mirrored in his experiences many of our own. As a child David was raised by Jungian parents, his father Max Zeller was a respected Jungian analyst. What an unusual and fortunate environment he grew up in, being exposed to dream analysis, myths, astrology, and the I Ching. His Jewish parents survived the Holocaust and emigrated from Germany to Los Angeles, California. As David was fond of saying, “I was raised an orthodox Jungian and a Reform Jew. Through a lot of wandering and wondering, I became an Orthodox Jew and a reform Jungian” (p. xiv). David was a child of the sixties, he was a folk singer, and at the Berkeley Folk Festival in the summer of 1966 he met his primary teacher, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. His first meeting with Shlomo, as delightfully described in this book, gave David a profound transpersonal opening into boundless joy. Many consider David’s singing and teaching style to be directly influenced by Shlomo’s work.

The list of people that David met and which organizes each chapter is a very impressive array of some of the seminal spiritual guides of our time. They include: Carl Jung, Shlomo Carlebach, Alan Watts, Thomas Banyaca, Sri Pad Baba, The Mother (from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram), Tony Sutich, Carlos Castaneda, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Swami Radha, Carl Rogers, Ram Dass and many others. What is even more impressive is that Rabbi Zeller is able to convey all these deep wisdom encounters in the form of humorous and highly readable teaching stories.

I also found this book moving in that the author courageously digs deeply into his own story and reveals his personal anguish as well as his awakening. He chronicles his first wife Elana’s struggle with cancer and his meeting with his second wife Hannah-Sara. He reveals in detail how his life work was shaped by the varied strands of the tapestry of his life that wove together in a beautiful and surprising manner. After his studies he went to Israel and then India. While in India he actually lived the simple life of a wandering holy man (Sadhu), meditating, bathing in rivers, and begging for food. In these stories and others David exhibits the ability to communicate deep transpersonal states of awakening consciousness while keeping a shrewd eye on his ego and the ego of the spiritual world around him.
From 1972 to 1981 David Zeller was a seminal figure in transpersonal psychology. He helped establish the first accredited B.A. in the field (University of Redlands, Redlands, CA) and then the first accredited Ph.D. program (Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.). During my years as a Ph.D. student at ITP, David’s presence as assistant director was a very important component of that transformative experience. His daily chanting and meditation sessions opened a beautiful transpersonal space for our studies. During these years David also introduced Jewish mystical teachings (the Kabalah) and teachers into a field that was mostly built around Buddhist, Yogic, and Sufi models. Subsequently he reversed the process and in 1981 he took Transpersonal Psychology into Judaism by founding the Network of Conscious Judaism and then in 1985 after moving to Israel he helped create Yakar: Center for Tradition and Creativity, and Shevet: Center for Jewish Spirituality and Meditation.

I highly recommend this book if you are interested in this gifted teacher’s autobiographical global odyssey. He has an effortless writing style that spans many of the great spiritual traditions with wit and wisdom. You can also hear his beautiful angelic voice singing mystical songs on the five CDs he recorded, and which are available commercially.

I must regretfully report that Rabbi David Zeller passed away from a rare blood disorder May, 2007. His passing was peaceful and gracious as was his presence here with us. He will be missed by many, but fortunately for us in this book and in his music he lives on.

The Author

Rabbi David Zeller will be remembered as a pioneer in Transpersonal Psychology and Jewish Spirituality; he helped establish learning centers in both fields. He traveled extensively sharing wisdom stories and his inspirational music. Rabbi Zeller produced five recordings of his beautiful meditative singing. An internet site about him and his work is accessible at this writing: http://davidzeller.org.

The Reviewer

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