

The Raelian Movement

We have come to the final section of our course. We are now going to take a look at one of the most controversial varieties of UFO spirituality: the Raelian Movement. As most of you know, the Raelians came to widespread media attention in 2002, when they claimed to have cloned a human being. Since their initial announcement of a cloned human baby on December 26, 2002, the Raelians have issued press releases claiming additional cloned human births. They have also announced that twenty new couples have been selected for the next phase of human cloning, and that the implantation of cloned human embryos for these couples has been successfully accomplished. Clearly, the topic of cloning in general, and human cloning in particular, is a controversial one. For the Raelians, however, cloning is not only a viable scientific enterprise: it is a religious obligation. According to the Raelians, the ability to clone ourselves is a necessary prerequisite to our taking our place in the grand cosmic plan of the universe.

Origins of the Raelian Movement

The origins of the Raelian Movement lie in the contactee experience of the Movement's founder, Rael, born Claude Vorilhon in 1946. Vorilhon was a race car driver and the founding editor of a magazine devoted to motor sports. According to his own account, Vorilhon was taking a break from the race-car circuit by visiting a volcano in the Clarmont-Ferrand region of southern France on December 13, 1973, when he witnessed the landing of a UFO. He recalls being filled with joy to witness such an event, because he had always believed in UFOs, but had never expected to see one. The UFO, or Flying Saucer as Vorilhon called it, "measured some seven meters in height, was flat underneath and cone-shaped. On its underside, a very bright red light flashed, while at the top an intermittent white light reminded me of a camera flash cube.

This white light was so intense, that I could not look at it without blinking.”ⁱ Upon landing, the UFO opened a door, and an extraterrestrial visitor emerged. According to Vorilhon,

First two feet appeared then two legs, which reassured me a little, since apparently I was about to meet a man, In the event, what at first I took to be a child came down the stairway and walked straight towards me. I could see then this was certainly no child even though the figure was only about four feet (1.2 meters) tall. His eyes were slightly almond shaped, his hair was black and long, and he had a small black beard... He wore some sort of green one-piece suit, which covered his entire body, and although his head seemed to be exposed, I could see around it a strange sort of halo. ... His skin was white with a slightly greenish tinge, a bit like someone with liver trouble... I asked, “Where do you come from?” He answered in a strong, articulate voice that was slightly nasal: “From very far away.”ⁱⁱ

According to Vorilhon’s account, the alien told him that the reason he had felt the urge to travel to the isolated Volcano location that day was because the alien had transmitted the impulse via telepathy. He was further told that his recent impulse to purchase a Bible had been telepathically sent. He was told to return the next day with his Bible, and that the extraterrestrial visitor would teach him the truth about human origins.

The next day, Vorilhon returns to the Volcano and again meets with his extraterrestrial visitor. The visitor proceeds to go through the Bible and point out how the book contains elements of the truth regarding human origins. Our origins were not divine, however: instead, they were the result of alien technology. For example, where the book of Genesis says “In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth,” Vorilhon’s extraterrestrial visitor told him that Elohim was incorrectly translated as “god.” Instead, the word meant “those who came from the sky,” meaning extraterrestrials, and was plural.ⁱⁱⁱ Similarly, when Genesis says, “The Elohim saw that the light was good,” it meant that the alien visitors determined that our sun was not sending harmful rays to earth, and that earth could therefore support life. In this way, the alien visitor taught Vorilhon that extraterrestrial scientists had created all life on earth. Having done

so, they created human beings in their own image. However, they did refrain from giving us their own extended lifespans, for to do so would mean we would have the time to learn enough on an individual basis to rival their own level of scientific and technological abilities.

Apparently, however, some extraterrestrial Elohim wished to provide us with precisely that: they wished to give us extended lifespans, and to educate human beings in scientific knowledge to equal their own. These are the beings to whom we have given the collective name “Satan.” What “Satan” wanted to do was illegal on the alien home world, and in punishment for trying to break this prohibition, the Elohim who wanted to let us reach our full potential were banished to earth, and all the other scientists were ordered to leave the planet. Before they left, however, they taught human beings the basics of survival.

The exiled Elohim made the earth their home. They interbred with human women, and produced exceptional children, whose talents and potential were threatening to those in power on the home world. As a result, a decision was made to destroy all the created life on earth. The home world aliens sent nuclear bombs to destroy us, but our exiled creator scientists sent instructions to Noah on how to build a space ship that would store our genetic material, in the form of a single cell from a male and female of each species, to prevent our annihilation. According to Vorilhon’s account, “When the explosion took place, life had already been preserved a few thousand kilometers above the Earth. The continent was submerged by a gigantic tidal wave, which destroyed all forms of life on its surface.”^{iv} Proof that Noah’s ark really was a space ship is provided in the Biblical passage Genesis 7:17, which reads “The ark was lifted above the Earth.”^v Our exiled creators then dispersed the radioactive energies, and directed Noah to release the life he had stored. Life once again flourishes on earth, and humans continue with their relationships both to the exiled Elohim, who remained here, and with

visiting Elohim from the home world, who continued to interfere with human civilizations every time we came close to rivalling their technology and science (i.e., they blew up Sodom and Gomorrah and the Tower of Babel...). Eventually, fortunately for us, the home world realized we were not a threat, we were simply following our genetic imperative to learn and grow scientifically. Now, they no longer wish to destroy us, they wish to teach us. They are simply awaiting a time when we will be ready to hear their message. This is why they contacted Claude Vorilhon: they wished him to prepare the way for their coming, by spreading the truth of our origins.

Clearly, the contactee experience of Claude Vorilhon follows the pattern we have seen in other contexts. His contactee experience took place in an isolated location, he was telepathically directed to meet the aliens, they initiated the contact rather than he, light was a dominant symbol, and so on. Also apparent is that the alien message mirrors fairly closely the ideas of Erich von Daniken's ancient astronaut theory. However, von Daniken never claimed to be a contactee, and explicitly denied any intention of founding a church. Vorilhon, on the other hand, was given an explicit messianic role to play in re-establishing contact with these extraterrestrial visitors. He was also given a new name - Rael - which means "messenger," "light of God," or "Ambassador of the Elohim."^{vi} He has gone by this name ever since.

Worldview: The Raelian Movement

The worldview of the Raelian Movement is atheistic and materialistic, monistic and multi-tiered, hedonistic, messianic and millennial. The message of Rael is determinedly atheist, in that any traces of supernaturalism have been avoided. Although the primary document for unraveling human history is the Bible, all mention of God or divinity is replaced by an emphasis on extraterrestrial action. There is no divine creator in the Raelian system of thought, no "first

cause” of the universe. Instead, the universe is conceptualized as infinite - as having always existed, and always existing. Rael’s extraterrestrial guide told him, “there is no God, and obviously, no soul. After death there is nothing, unless science is used to create something.”^{vii} Human beings were created through the scientific experiments of extraterrestrials, not divine causation. According to Rael’s teachings, we owe honour and respect to our extraterrestrial parents, but we do not owe worship or adoration . They are not gods. Rael’s guide, it is revealed, is actually Yahweh - but he is an extraterrestrial humanoid, not a god.

The worldview of the Raelian Movement is also therefore materialistic. Everything within the Raelian universe is understood in materialistic terms, including things like human personal identity. Materialism is perhaps the most important element of Raelian worldview, for it encapsulates so many elements of the Raelian system of thought. The first implication of the materialism of the Raelian system is that there is no supernatural or metaphysical element to human identity. According to Rael’s guide,

If one can imagine an immortal soul escaping from the body after death - an image that is very poetic but rather naive since it comes from the minds of primitives - one cannot imagine where it would go, given that the universe is infinite. The quantity of energy that flies off at the time of death disperses in a random way, losing all identity as it blends with all the energies suspended in the surrounding air. That identity is obviously engraved only in organized matter, such as the cells of a living being that has just died. This matter is organized according to the blueprint, which the genes of the male and the female determined at conception while creating the first cell.^{viii}

According to Raelian teachings, our cells record not only a genetic blueprint determined at birth, however, but also the learned characteristics attained during life, such as scientific knowledge and personality. This teaching is a variation of something called Lamarckian genetics - the nonorthodox scientific theory that we can inherit not only biological, but acquired, characteristics. According to Rael’s guide, cloning on the alien homeworld has reached such a

point that it is possible to recreate not only the physical body from the cellular blueprint, but the knowledge and personality also. Rael's guide told him,

When we are in full possession of our abilities and our brain is at its maximum efficiency and knowledge, we surgically remove a tiny part of the body which is conserved. When we die, from a minute particle of our body which had already been preserved, we fully recreate the body, as it was at that time. I say as it was that time, meaning with all its scientific knowledge, and of course, its personality.^{ix}

This means that there is some biological mechanism whereby our "selves" get stored in the "cells" of the body - we do not have some etheric or metaphysical component that records these things.

The second implication of the materialism of Raelian worldview is that life as we know it always requires material intervention to create. There is no such thing as divine creation within the Raelian system of thought. However, there is no such thing as natural evolution either. Raelians reject the theory of evolution, and argue instead in favour of the theory of extraterrestrial causation. Evolution, Rael argues, is incapable of creating advanced life forms - just as we are the creation of extraterrestrials, so to are they the creation of other extraterrestrials even more advanced than they. This chain continues into infinity - there is no first 'naturally occurring' species. Because of this infinite chain of creation, it is our religious responsibility to learn to clone ourselves, as the first step in being able to create the next species in the created chain of beings that populates the galaxy. Our creators, the Elohim, want us to reach this ability, because they have realized that their own creators, and those who came before, are no longer present in the universe - they have vanished. The Elohim wonder if they, too, are destined to

vanish, and so to ensure that humanity does not die out in the universe, they wish us to reach the point where we can pass along our own genetic code to our own cloned offspring elsewhere in the universe.^x

Another implication of the materialism of the Raelian worldview is its overwhelming emphasis on science. According to Rael's guide,

Science is the most important thing of all for humanity. You will keep yourself in touch with the advances made by scientists, because they can solve all your problems. Do not let scientific discoveries fall into the hands of those who think only of making profit, nor into the hands of them military, who keep certain inventions secret in order to retain a hypothetical supremacy over illusory enemies. Science should be your religion, for the Elohim created you scientifically. By being scientific, you please your creators, because you are acting as they do, and you show them that you understand that you were made in their image, and are anxious to take advantage of all the potential that you have within you. Science must be used to serve and liberate humankind, not to destroy and alienate it. Trust those scientists who are not being manipulated by financial interests, and only them.^{xi}

Science therefore is the path to wisdom, peace, harmony, progress, immortality, and so on. The Elohim are said to be 25,000 years in advance of us scientifically. It is our task to emulate their scientific knowledge, and in doing so become worthy of their future contact with earth. Only when enough of the earth's population has rejected religion, and adopted science as the basis of their worldview, will the Elohim reappear. Only when we have abandoned a religious interpretation of our creation, and accepted the theory of extraterrestrial origins, will the Elohim reappear. Science, both the practice of it, and the acceptance of it as a basis for political, economic, and philosophical systems, is central to the Raelian worldview.

The worldview of the Raelian movement is also monistic and multi-tiered. It is monistic in that it posits a universe that is one complex whole, made up of an infinite number of smaller parts. The universe is conceptualized as a giant, infinitely huge, unending body, with the galaxies representing its atoms, and suns and planets its molecules. There is sentient life on

many of these planets. However, within these forms of life are found other molecules, right down to tiny atoms, each of which is also populated by sentient beings, looking up and wondering about the nature of the universe, and so on. This imagery is described by Yahweh, Rael's guide, as follows:

Our own research continues for the purpose of understanding and relating to the large being of whom we are a part, and on whose atoms we are parasites. These atoms are the planets and the stars. In fact we have been able to discover intelligent living beings in the infinitely small, who live on particles that are planets and suns to them. They ask the same questions as ourselves. Humanity is a disease inside this gigantic being and the planets and stars are its atoms. Also this same gigantic being is in its turn a parasite on other greater atoms. In both directions infinity exists. But the important thing is to make sure that the disease, which is humanity, continues to exist and never dies.^{xii}

As Yahweh tells Rael, the extraterrestrial Elohim are focussed on understanding and relating to the giant being that is our universe - a search for union that falls within the monistic type of worldview. The universe is multi-tiered, because each level of particles, from the tiniest atoms to the largest galaxies are different levels of being, where different sentient species dwell. The levels within the Raelian worldview go on forever in both directions.

Getting in touch with the infinite being that is the universe is a spiritual goal in the Raelian movement, and leads to the next element of Raelian worldview: hedonism. Hedonism is defined in the dictionary as "the doctrine that pleasure is the only proper goal of moral endeavour."^{xiii} Long before the Raelians became controversial in the media for their position on cloning, they were controversial because they believe that pleasure, including sexual pleasure, is necessary for fulfilment of the human purpose. According to Rael's guide,

All things that bring pleasure are positive, as long as that pleasure is not harmful to anyone in any way. This is why all sensual pleasure is positive, for sensuality is always an opening up to the outside world, and all such opening is good. On earth you are only just emerging from all those primitive taboos that tried to make anything to do with sex or nudity appear evil, whereas nothing could possibly be

purser. Nothing is more disappointing for your creators than to hear people say that nudity is something bad: nudity, the image of what we have made.^{xiv}

One implication of this aspect of Raelian worldview is that Raelians do not confine themselves to mainstream sexual orientation categories or behaviours. Nudity is common at Raelian sensual meditation camps, and sexual experimentation is encouraged. According to one researcher, when she tried to find out via a survey whether Raelian members were gay, lesbian, heterosexual, and so on, many members objected strongly to her “rigid” and “misleading” categories.^{xv} Raelians believe that developing all the senses, including sexual senses, is a path to oneness with the universe, and also a path to communication with the Elohim. Given this conviction, it is not surprising that one of the primary rituals within the Raelian movement is oriented towards learning to fulfil oneself pleurably. This ritual is called “sensual meditation,” and we will discuss it more fully below.

The final elements of Raelian worldview that I wanted to discuss are the messianic and millennial elements. The worldview is messianic, in that Rael is given an explicit religious agenda by the Elohim, and is appointed by them to be their “prophet.” According to Yahweh, Rael’s guide, Rael is the 40th in a line of prophets that include Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed. Yahweh tells Rael,

You are the last of the prophets before the Judgement, you are the prophet of the religion of religions, the demystifier and the shepherd of shepherds. You are the one whose coming was announced in all the religions by the ancient prophets, our representatives. You are the one who will bring back the shepherds’ flocks before the water is spilled, the one who will bring back to their creators those they have created. Those who have ears may hear, those who have eyes may see. All those who have their eyes open will see that you are the first prophet who can be understood only by scientifically evolved beings. All that you speak of is incomprehensible to primitive peoples. This is a sign that will be noticed by those whose eyes are open - the sign of the Revelation, the Apocalypse.^{xvi}

Provided Rael does as the Elohim ask, Rael's place is assured in paradise: he will be cloned, and live eternally on the alien homeworld alongside other humans who have warranted their place there. The tasks that the Elohim have set him include spreading their message, but also include the building of an embassy, where they can land when they do come back to earth. The building of the embassy has not yet been accomplished: according to the Raelians, they have collected 7 million dollars towards this goal, but still have two-thirds of the money yet to accumulate. Detailed plans for the embassy, including floor plans and suggested locations, were given to Rael by Yahweh. Rael is currently negotiating with the Israeli government to build the embassy in Isreal, for the Jewish people are apparently special to the Elohim, being among the best designed of their genetic experiments. The Raelian movement wishes to build the Embassy if possible by the year 2025, for they believe that the Elohim will be coming to earth sometime around the year 2035. This millenial expectation governs their objectives, for in order to be worthy of the return of the Elohim, the embassy must be built, science must be developed, cloning must be practiced, and sensual meditation must be practiced by a large but unspecified number of human beings. Right now, Raelians claim 60,000 members. Ten years ago, they only claimed 35,000. If this increase in numbers is accurate, the Raelians may well be on the path to achieving their millenial goals by the year 2035. However, if the Raelians fail in spreading the word, or in accomplishing any of these tasks, the Elohim when they return may destroy us as they have done before, so as to start over and have us try once again to become worthy of our creators. Or we may destroy ourselves, for we will have failed to pursue peace and pleasure, and will have followed the warlike path to our doom.

Organization and Practices: The Raelian Movement

Organizationally, the Raelian movement has six levels of initiation: the first level, that of someone who has just joined, is called Probationer. A probationer is someone who has done two things: made funeral arrangements to have a piece of bone removed after death and stored for future cloning purposes once the Elohim have arrived, and who have undergone a “transmission of the code” ceremony, which we will discuss in a minute. After that level, comes “Assistant Animator,” then “Animator,” “Assistant Guide,” “Priest Guide,” “Bishop Guide,” and “Planetary Guide,” - this last rank being Rael’s own title.

All members of the Raelian movement have a set of commandments that they must follow, passed down from Yahweh to Rael. These commandments are as follows:

You will appear at least once in your lifetime before the Guide of Guides so that he may transmit your cellular plan through manual contact, or have it transmitted by an initiated guide, to the computer that will take this into account at your life’s final hour of judgement.

You will think at least once a day of the Elohim, your Creators.

You will try to radiate the message of the Elohim around you by every possible means.

You will, at least once a year, give a donation to the Guide of Guides that is equal to at least one percent of your annual income, in order to help him devote himself full time to his mission and travel around the world to spread this message.

You will, at least once a year, invite the Guide of your region into your home, and you will gather at your place people who are interested in hearing him explain the message in all its dimensions.^{xvii}

Because of these commandments, one of the central rituals in the Raelian movement is called the transmission of the cellular plan. In this ritual, the genetic code of members of the Movement is transmitted telepathically to visiting Elohim, who orbit our world four times a year in UFOs for the specific purpose of recording these transmissions.^{xviii} Raelians also sign a

mortuary contract in which they agree to have a piece of bone removed from their foreheads after death, to be stored for the future when the Elohim will arrive. According to Rael,

the cellular plan, or genetic code, of each individual, is registered in an enormous computer which records all our actions during our life, from the time of our conception, from the meeting of the ovule and the spermatozoon, the moment when a new genetic code is registered, hence, a new individual. The individual will be followed through his lifetime, and at the end of his life, the computer will know if he has the right to eternal life on the planet where the Elohim accept in their midst, only the most worthy of men and women.^{xix}

In this way, the transmission of the cellular plan offers the possibility of eternal life via cloning to Raelian members. However, there is no guarantee that any particular individual will be cloned: only by living an exemplary life, in accord with the teachings of the Elohim as passed down by Rael, can one hope to be offered immortality on another world.

Another central practice within the Raelian Movement, as we have mentioned, is something called sensual meditation. According to Rael, “if you feel like doing something, first see that it does no harm to anyone, then do it without worrying about what others think of it. If you feel like having a sensual or sexual experience with one or several other individuals, whatever sex they may be, you may behave as your desire as long as they agree. Everything is permitted on the path to fulfilment in order to awaken the body, and hence the mind.” Because of this conviction, Raelians hold sensual meditation camps once a year, where both members and non members are welcome. The sensual mediation camps focus on opening the senses, and in doing so helping to put the person in touch with the Elohim and the universe. On the first day of the camp, everyone fasts for 24 hours, and drink nothing but water, and they don’t talk during this time either. After this period, they open themselves up to sensual things by beginning to eat again, and by surrounding themselves with beautiful things. Over the course of the next 4 days

or so, they learn to explore their senses, and the world around them, including the world of bodies should they choose. One woman's account reads as follows:

A lot of people think that [its an orgy], but most of those people never come to see what really happens... that's not what happens at all, it's not like an orgy! We do, after 24 hours, have a supper and so on, when you can open up your senses, and if you do find someone appealing, if you feel like going with that person and sharing a beautiful evening or night with him or her... it could even be with another woman, but why not? It's beautiful, you're opening your senses, but you don't have to, it's not an obligation. If someone came to you and asked you, 'I'd like to sleep with you' and you don't want to, and that person insists, well, that's not right. That person should not insist if he's really sincere with himself, herself. ..It's never happened to me like that, I've never had anybody come up to me and say, "hey, baby! I'd like to sleep with you." It's not somebody you've never seen before. He's more likely to just come up and say, "I sincerely like you and I find you pretty." They're not going to say they want to sleep with you right away, because it's sensuality that comes out of it, not sexuality. Sensuality is when you eat, drink, or smell something nice, or when you touch something that's soft, and it's the same thing with a person."^{xx}

So exploring the senses is a key component of Raelian spirituality, and the sensual meditation camps are a yearly ritual time in which Raelians can get together and practice this ritual without fear of ridicule and condemnation by a society that tends to be somewhat more rigid in its sexual mores than the Raelian Movement.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rael. The Message Given by Extraterrestrials. The Raelian Foundation, 1998: 14. This book is a reprint of Rael's books "The Book which tells the Truth" and "Extra-Terrestrials took me to their Planet."

ⁱⁱ Ibid, pp. 14-15.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 20.

^{iv} Ibid, p. 27.

^v Ibid, p. 27.

^{vi} Ibid, pp 84.

^{vii} Ibid, p. 144.

^{viii} Ibid, p. 143.

^{ix} Ibid, pp. 97

^x Ibid, p. 96.

^{xi} Ibid, p. 189.

^{xii} Ibid, p. 81

xiii Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, Volume 1. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, Inc. 1979.

xiv The Message, p. 152.

xv Palmer, Susan Jean “Women in the Raelian Movement: New Religious Experiments in Gender and Authority,” in The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds. Ed. James R. Lewis. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 118.

xvi The Message, pp. 162-163.

xvii The Message, p. 162.

xviii Palmer, “Women in the Raelian Movement: New Religious Experiments in Gender and Authority,” in The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds. Ed. James R. Lewis. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, pp 105-135, p. 107.

xix Rael. Let’s Welcome our Fathers from Space: They Created Humanity in their Laboratories. Tokyo: AOM Corporation, 1986, p. 29-30

xx Quoted in Palmer, 1995, p. 120.