

Richard Rose, The Man Who Was a Mirror

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About Richard Rose

It was billed as "The Lecture of Questions" to be given at Kent State University by an American Zen teacher named Richard Rose. The year was 1973. I was twenty-three, confused and searching for something "real", but by then not even sure such a thing existed, let alone that I'd ever find it.

At first it was difficult to hear the speaker at the podium, since I was in the very back of the over-crowded classroom. People were standing three or four deep directly in front of me, behind the rows of occupied chairs. I would guess there were at least a hundred people, mostly students, who had come out to see what Zen and Richard Rose was all about.

I started to focus on the speaker's voice – a tone of voice more penetrating than I'd ever heard. His words gradually began to register in my consciousness, and something touched me in a way I cannot explain, almost an electrical shock of sorts. It was the same feeling of relief you get when finding a clear signal in the heavy static on a radio. The first words I heard Richard Rose speak come readily to mind even today, and they come now as they did then, in the form of a question.

"Does the man own the house, or does the house own the man?" The room became quiet, brought to attention by his voice. "What is thought?" he asked. "Do we have a soul? Does a man reason, or is he so programmed? Are we only a body? What is sin? What is duration?" The questions followed one another in a staccato rhythm. Though I didn't know anything about Zen, I somehow knew this man was speaking the Truth, and speaking from experience. I had to find out more about him, and the sooner the better.

I accepted a friend's invitation to visit Rose as his home, and a week later I was a bit surprised to find myself standing nervously outside an old three story house in Benwood, West Virginia. Behind that door was Richard Rose, but what else we'd find along with him was a mystery. By then I'd heard he was a "Zen" teacher, a philosopher, and a mystic – and "like nobody you've ever met in your life". My stomach was tense as we knocked, but it turned out I had little to fear. We were expected and warmly welcomed. Rose made "hobo" coffee – grounds boiled in a pan of water – and we settled into casual conversation about life in general.

Rose was easy to talk to, yet there was something different about him. He may have been a teacher, but he wasn't like any of my college professors. It was hard to pinpoint the nature of the difference. He had a lot of vitality and a contained energy like a stoked down wood stove or steam engine. He was without a doubt a man with intensity of purpose, a mission. That much was obvious. Though the conversation was casual, it still seemed like everything was headed in a specific direction, but I couldn't quite figure out where. He had a sense of humor, too, and was actually hilarious at times, with a far reaching cosmic

perspective on life and its ironies. He displayed an amazing knack for seasoning conversation with pith filled puns and unexpected double entendres.

He was in his mid-fifties, with piercing, twinkling blue eyes, a short gray goatee, and a wisp of gray hair on top. Short, maybe five feet and a few inches, but powerfully built with strong, thick hands. He wore ordinary conservative clothes—a long sleeve shirt, long pants and black leather shoes. He seemed comfortable in his clothes and in his skin, moving with a natural agility and grace like a panther or a man who knows exactly who he is and what he's doing at all times. Did I say he was in his fifties? He seemed more like twenty-five to me, or maybe he was one of those ageless people everybody hears about. We talked for hours, though they seemed to pass in a heartbeat. The room began to change somehow; it became smaller, closer, and more comfortable, like an old flannel shirt. The air seemed thick with possibility and permeated by a palpable feeling that some unknown important event was about to happen ... or was happening at that very moment. Little did I suspect ...

Apparently Rose had been actively searching for Truth (or God) ever since he could remember. After a childhood filled with mysterious events, predictions, and psychic experiences, he enrolled in the seminary at age twelve to fulfill his mother's wishes, and by his own admission, to find God. That was probably the official beginning of his life as a Seeker, which spanned some twenty years, and covered chemistry in college, séances, yoga, meditation, vegetarian diet, and celibacy, among many other related pursuits. Around the age of thirty, he did finally find something, and the cataclysmic event that occurred in 1947, called Enlightenment by various writers, changed his life forever. And it would also change the lives, minds and hearts of hundreds of people who came into contact with him over the ensuing years, including my own. He began giving public lectures to fulfill a promise he made when he was searching "under every rock" for answers; a promise to make information available for free to interested people, if and when he ever found something. Like many others, I am very grateful he made that promise.

Much of what we talked about that day is forgotten, but I remember laughing at his quick repartee and acerbic wit, and being amazed at the incredible range of his knowledge. Rose talked quickly and concisely, with measured tones and syllables, varying his use of the English language and tone of voice in a unique way. It would be hard to fall asleep listening to him talk. I would later discover he had an extensive vocabulary, and was a master at using words to express the subtle nuances of meaning and experience, something that was somewhat inconsistent with his humble surroundings. But he didn't come across as an intellectual or pedantic in any way. On the contrary, he was a somewhat ribald, humorous concoction of apparently endless stories, observations, opinions, and penetrating insights on all aspects of life, from the mundane to the sublime. Over the course of the morning, he managed to make a very insecure, somewhat depressed, and definitely confused young man comfortable enough to relax, laugh, and come alive. Rose's vitality and passion for life was contagious.

When I met Rose, I didn't know anything about spiritual paths, gurus, Enlightenment or Zen, but I was inspired by his honesty, lack of pretense, and dynamic presence. He seemed much larger than life, and I wanted to be around him. I learned more about life in a few hours that morning in the kitchen than I had learned in the previous twenty-three years. Those hours were the beginning of a lifelong friendship and admiration for a totally selfless, dynamic human being who for decades gave freely of his time and

energy to help others find themselves. Even today, in this age where spiritual teachers, pundits, and gurus appear as if by magic everywhere we look, Rose is considered by many to be America's most astute self-styled Enlightened man. I also consider him to be the man who saved my life.

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The Early Years

After Rose gave a talk at a university, those who were interested in working with him would get together and rent a house, which then became the local "Ashram". The group would secure a meeting room, advertise with handmade posters, and meet regularly to discuss life's big questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go after I die? So about a month after Rose's lecture, I moved into a ramshackle old house in Kent, Ohio, along with three or four other students, one of whom Rose appointed as the "Monitor" of our fledgling group.

We read Rose's self-published book, *The Albigen Papers*; we read other books, on Zen and The Fourth Way; we read Blavatsky, Eliphas Levi, and Van der Leeuw. We participated in confrontation sessions and group meditation and spent hours trying to grasp what "finding Truth" was all about. It was heady stuff, the "real thing", no doubt about it. We were "working on ourselves", struggling to find ourselves, our purpose and meaning. It was a time of great turmoil, change, growth, and mystery, but somehow everything fit together seamlessly, revolving around Rose at the center, solid as a rock. As he gave more lectures, other groups began to form at various universities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and even as far away as Boston, Washington DC, and Los Angeles. Rose spoke wherever he was invited, without compensation. Many times he paid his own expenses and transportation costs, but he didn't worry about it too much. "You can't mix money and spirituality" he said, "There's no price on Truth, if there was; you couldn't charge enough for it."

Rose usually visited once a month, though we never knew what to expect from him; he could pop in at any time, he might call, or send a letter. One winter day Rose came to Kent for a public meeting, wearing a long wool topcoat coat and a vintage wide brimmed fedora, a style from the forties that suited him well. As he entered the room, he took off his hat and tossed it about 6 or 8 feet toward the coat rack in the corner, over the table and the heads of the people sitting around it. He never broke stride, or gave it a second look. The hat sailed like on a string onto the top shelf, almost like something you'd see in an old silent movie. There was never a doubt as to its final resting place, nor was there any reaction from Rose. Though it was a trivial incident, it says something about the man. For Rose, everything was simply part of the character he was destined to play, or, as he said once "it's part of the old man act." Like Shakespeare, he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players" However, unlike most people, Rose consciously lived that knowledge at every moment. In today's non-dual paradigm, it's called nonvolitional living.

One day a letter came to the house, and we all knew the handwriting; it was from Rose. Inside we found a single typed page, and an attached note with instructions to post the letter on the kitchen bulletin board. This was something important, and the first lines read ominously:

[../writings/richard-rose-notice.htm](http://writings/richard-rose-notice.htm)

NOTICE

To those who would steal, subvert, and enslave; your identity is known, and your masks and alias are known.

LUST

Alias love, "my need," celebration of a successful period of celibacy, alias poor man's pleasure (sex), alias the other side of the coin.

LAZINESS

Alias "wise relinquishment of the ego of being a doer," alias "the process of crouching and waiting for the big kill," alias recuperation from pitiful excesses and the trauma therefrom.

PRIDE

Alias strength, alias wit, flexibility (wishy washy, Pollyanna, indecisive), alias manifest equanimity, alias power to squelch, alias art of compensation, alias virtue of relinquishment, alias discernment (of wise men like Watts and Castenada, who give us an easy way).

PROCRASTINATION

Alias logic, alias gradualism, alias "one thing at a time" (preferably something else), alias waiting for God's will or a sign from heaven, alias strengthening all my I's (by simultaneously doing kung fu, saying prayers and indulging in mental games of chess, or in taking Rose's advice but applying the advised course of action at a negative time), alias going to school, alias not going to school.

TO THE ABOVE CHARACTERS

Let it be known that force and non-force shall be used against them. That they shall be neutralized by recognition and non-recognition. Know that it is important to recognize a negative quality, but it is likewise negative to recognize them as being important.

Let it be known that to overcome these criminals of our fifty states of mind that incessant action shall be used forthwith, but that he who acts shall not be an actor (robot) of action process (mechanicalness). Let it be known that our strategy shall be to use the powers of these criminals against themselves: we shall procrastinate lust, and employ procrastination to the urges of the voices, and we shall use pride to temporarily fuel the fires of determination, by rejoicing in our successes against the wasters.

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The letter was Rose the Zen Master in action, creating tension in our lives, from two hundred miles away. Every person in the house was directly confronted by something in that letter. He could always be relied upon to say or do the unexpected, with great regularity. He kept us on our toes, or, said another way, he forced us to "wake up", and become aware of our mechanical natures, by his own being, presence and demeanor. He was "a live wire", a human dynamo, at all times, everywhere, in all the little details we so often overlook. It didn't matter whether you were peeling potatoes, stacking firewood,

discussing a book, or running a meeting; if you were distracted or unfocussed, Rose would point it out, adroitly, succinctly, and often, humorously ... at your expense.

Rose inspired confidence and trust, and consequently, I was one of the many people who confided in him. He had no blanket formulas, except banning use of alcohol and drugs. He related to each person individually, and would make suggestions or give advice based on specific temperament, situations and personal history. For one person, he might recommend eating more meat, and getting more exercise, while for another, he might suggest becoming a vegetarian for a while, and spend less time at the track or gym, and more time in solitude.

In spiritual or esoteric matters, he always spoke to the inner self, that part we identify with most and rarely allow others to see. Many times, after a talk, whether formal or informal, when comparing notes, different group members would insist that he was speaking directly to them individually at some point in the talk. Somehow he managed to pick up or intuit the real issues each person was facing, and could speak to them in the course of a conversation or the lecture, without actually singling out anyone in particular.

Rose was a mixture of dynamic energy, pervasive humor, intense awareness, and contagious vitality. His demeanor included an easy fluidity without a hint of pretense. He always appeared to be at ease, in tune with his surroundings, and totally comfortable in his own skin, qualities I desired to emulate and achieve in my own life. In his late sixties, and even well into his seventies, he was strong and fit, working on the Farm alongside men often forty years younger than himself. He was a tough, rugged individualist, a product of the West Virginia mountains, who could swing a double-bladed axe all day long, lay brick, plant a garden, build a house and write poetry that brought people to tears. In our hearts we all asked the same questions: Who was Richard Rose? Where did he come from? What did he know?

Rose believed in working together, and nothing was beneath him in the struggle to become more communicable as he reached out to people in his commitment to help others. In his youth, he crisscrossed the country by bus to meet anyone who claimed to "know something", or have the answers to the riddle of Life. He was often disappointed, but occasionally met someone who helped fill in the blanks, or provide a hint of direction for his next steps. He met gurus, teachers, mystics, medicine men, and shamans, along with liars, charlatans, pretenders, and pontificators. He never gave up the Search and as a result, he was forged in the fire of experience into a man of will, determination, and capacity – a "vector" or force in a direction. And the direction was away from everything that was false. This is what he passed on to those who worked with him; a way of life that would provide solid foundation for the future, no matter what direction we chose.

He was constantly exhorting, cajoling, goading, hinting, and reminding us to think, plan, analyze, observe, and above all, ACT! And always, the Group, the Group, always he reminded us to "replace yourselves on the Ladder." He understood the value of combined effort, and the "Law of the Ladder" as he called it, where everyone helps everyone else, regardless of what level they were on, and as a result, all involved advanced. He learned this and other laws through direct experience, much of it in the contracting business. Everything was reduced to its simplest terms. "If you throw enough mud at the ceiling, some of it will stick," he said, meaning continued effort will eventually produce results. And through it all, in stark contrast to today's millionaire mega-gurus, he was meticulously "non-profit". In

forty years' association with him, he never once allowed me to buy him so much as a hamburger, this in spite of the fact that I ate dinner at his home countless times over the years.

Rose never made excuses, nor did he accept them from his students. "A man is what he does, not what he says," is a statement that sums up his attitude about character and commitment. I once called from Michigan to tell him I wasn't going to attend one of the large Farm meetings that took place four times a year. "Are you free?" he asked, which I thought was a philosophical question. As I began to trot out my soliloquy on personal freedom, he interrupted my rambling with a clarifying question: "I mean, are you in jail?" When I said no, he hung up the phone saying "Goodbye" with a tone of finality as only he could say it. I drove the three-hundred plus miles in record time. This was classic Rose; you do what you say you're going to do, or perish in the effort.

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The Farm

We used the Rose family farm about a dozen miles out of Benwood for an Ashram; a place where people could come to meditate, read, and find themselves in the peace of nature away from the clamor of city life. It was rustic and original, without the conveniences we were used to. Many came for a weekend, or a few weeks or months in the summer; others lived there full-time for many years, some in cabins they built, or in the bunkhouse on "the hill". Living on the Farm was a daily challenge, no matter what the season. We spent many long hours "chopping wood and carrying water", trying to make the old Farm more hospitable. We cut and logged timber to build a huge outdoor pavilion for large, open-air meetings a few times per year. Everything was done by hand without the luxury of large machinery. Young men who had no skills soon found themselves capable of wielding a shovel, hammer or saw with amazing ease. Those who came to the Farm depressed, weak, and incapable soon found themselves healthy and strong, and many went on to start their own successful businesses. Rose saved everything – cans, bottles, paper, string, rope – nothing was thrown away. When a house burned to the ground in town, he went through the rubble picking up nails, and we spent many hours on rainy days, straightening them for re-use later in our building projects. Once, when Rose was driving one of those recycled nails into an oak board, I saw the nail bend from a glancing blow. He immediately admonished it with the directive to "Stand up and fight like a man!" This little incident sums up his attitude completely. "You can't be stopped if you won't be stopped."

Rose believed people find themselves through hard work, attention, and group effort. He wasn't interested in making it easy, and often seemed to increase the difficulty of projects by adding special conditions, such as not allowing any board to be cut until you had conducted an exhaustive search for a board of the proper length. This was a laborious task, since being raised during the Depression, Rose saved every board, and we would have to crawl in, out, around, and over piles of lumber stored in various sheds, outbuildings, and even old vehicles! Woe unto the fellow who chose the easy way and cut a four foot board into a three foot board!

Working elbow-to-elbow with Rose on the Farm was always an exciting proposition, since he had a knack for bringing our various egos or "I's" to the forefront, and would often go to great extremes to do so. I once got into an intense discussion with him about the proper way to sharpen a knife. At the time, I

was running a framing crew building new houses, and prided myself on knowing how to put an edge on a tool. That pride proved to be my downfall when Rose took the discussion to an incredible depth, arguing that under a lens one could easily see that pulling the blade across the stone left tracks pointing toward the handle, which would facilitate a sharper cutting edge, while pushing it across the stone left the microscopic ridges pointing away from the handle, and a duller edge. Since he had once worked as a butcher, he knew what he was talking about. It was a humbling experience for me since the discussion took place in front of the whole crew, but it was also a valuable experience. Such was Zen, Richard Rose style. Though he often appeared to be ruthless, in reality he was trying to demonstrate how to think clearly and thoroughly about any subject, and, more importantly, to show us where we were attached to our personalities, pride and prejudices.

Rose often talked at great length spontaneously about everything from the mundane to the sublime. He spoke with absolute conviction and did not vacillate from one day to the next, nor did he make any attempt to ascribe to the commonly accepted beliefs of the mainstream masses. He was a man who truly marched to the beat of a distant drum, without equivocation – a powerful figure, unpretentious and ordinary, who inspired by action and example. And underlying everything was his solid belief that friendship was the pinnacle of human relationships, and that it included helping one another on all levels. To this day, I cannot imagine a better role model and mentor than Richard Rose.

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Of Miracles, Magic & More

Rose spent the majority of his life searching for answers, observing himself and others with the acute eye of a scientist. He read everything he could get his hands on; from Freud to Aquinas, from Blavatsky to Skinner. His stories about finding a genuine materializing medium were incredible. "I figured the best way to find out what happens after death was to talk to someone who had died," he said simply. That was Rose; always practical, never presumptuous, and always, always, doubting everything. "Doubt," he said, "is the essence of Zen," and Zen was the perfect psychoanalytical system that would lead to Absolute Truth. He even advised us to doubt everything he said – especially everything he said. A lifetime of such intensity had given him a grand overview of life that encompassed everything from car repair to esoteric philosophy; from psychology to politics; from religion to love – a view that answered to logic and common sense, that was so marvelously consistent it defied all description. In a way, I think many of us wanted to be like Rose, to have what he had, and to see and experience the world in the way he did. I know I did.

Rose believed in miracles. Not only the miracles we've heard about over the years, or read about, but he also believed miracles could and do happen, right here, right now. And he not only believed in miracles, but he actually did them! Every now and then, by some strange ability to "change the projection" as he sometimes called it, he would heal someone of a migraine headache, read someone's mind to the letter, or accurately describe what someone hundreds of miles away was saying or doing at that moment. He understood people and the human experience in a way that surpassed everything modern psychology had to offer. He seemed to be able to reach out with his mind and grasp concepts and ideas from all fields, and relate them to one another, and essentially, to the Truth as he experienced and lived it. Sometimes we were left speechless and humbled in the face of his discourse, but he often shook us out

of that state with a raucous or ribald story, with an infectious belly laugh that could shake even the most stoic among us. "There's time enough to be complacent after the undertaker is through with you," he would say, just to remind us of our ever-present mortality, yet one more time.

Rose liked to "loaf with people" as he called it, meaning he would sit for hours discussing philosophy. "What do you know for sure?" was his favorite question, and if you had an answer, he was always ready to penetrate the depths of your convictions. Once, during a long afternoon "kitchen session" with about a dozen others present, he engaged a student from Pittsburgh on some point of philosophy. Rose argued the exact opposite of the fellow's perspective. On and on it went, Rose asking questions, eliciting clarification and explanation, patiently and persistently, point and counterpoint. Suddenly, I began to sense a movement in the discussion; Rose had ever so gradually and gracefully begun to move his point of view more toward the other side of the issue. It was curious that the student so engaged had also begun to move from his original point of view toward its opposite – or towards Rose's original position! He didn't seem to notice, since he was caught up in an oppositional state of mind fostered by the original disagreement. It seemed impossible, but, incredibly, that's what was happening.

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After a little while, their positions were totally reversed, Rose arguing for the young man's belief, and the young man arguing for Rose's original statement! There was no doubt about it. The student appeared to be totally immersed and unaware of what had happened, that is, until the moment when Rose gleefully pointed out this role reversal with no small amount of humor! It was as if he had popped a balloon with a pin, such was the surprise and suddenness of the realization we had at that moment. We all woke up as if from a very strange dream. I had never seen or experienced anything like this before, and almost couldn't believe what had happened, because the student had been so adamant about his beliefs only a short time ago. This was a psychology different from any I'd ever encountered, exciting, alive, and very real. The regularity of strange and exciting events like this made me want to know more, more about Rose, more about myself. And, like many others, I also wanted to "get inside the head" of this mysterious, remarkable man, to see what made him tick.

Rose loved to laugh and have fun with people – good clean fun. He was a humorist at heart, who could turn a dour face into a smile with ease. He would play poker with you for hours, reading the cards or your mind almost at will. I thought I was a good poker player, and so he agreed to "bet" whatever I wanted. We started out with nickels. About an hour later, I found myself "owing" him over ten thousand dollars! He laughed the whole time, mostly at me. I learned a lot about myself that afternoon! If poker wasn't your game or if you were daring enough, Rose was happy put on the mask and fence with foils in the yard. At sixty-five, he had the energy and vitality of a twenty year old, and many a young man found out the hard way as Rose deftly wielded the old rusty foil, laughing and dancing in a perfect fencer's pose, overcoming with total ease any attempts we made at defense. And that included those of us who had some experience from college classes in fencing. He said he had learned from a Master, who would fence with a pencil. I don't remember anyone ever scoring a point on him with the foil. Ah, it was fun on those days.

Rose had an incredible intuition – it would be more accurate to call it psychic ability. When he looked at you with those piercing pale blue eyes it was impossible not to think he was seeing beyond the physical

body and personality into your very essence. He often accurately reported in great detail events and the experiences of others that had happened, or were happening at that moment, many miles away. To witness this type of thing was sometimes a bit unnerving. Around 1980, for example, I took a "sabbatical" and stopped visiting the Farm for about three months. I had a new girlfriend and was spending most of my free time in her charming company. One beautiful summer day we had a picnic on top of a large hill under an old oak tree, overlooking acres of grass waving in the wind. We spent the day relaxing and passing the time as people do when romance is young. A few weeks later, when I finally managed to find my way back to Rose's Farm in West Virginia, he said upon greeting me with outstretched hand "Ah, Casari, I see you spent some time on top of a hill under an old oak tree with the red-haired girl," a statement that left me absolutely stunned and speechless! When I asked, incredulous, how he could possibly know that, he said simply with a shrug of his shoulders "Sometimes I just know things, that's all." Events like that happened so frequently around Rose that he was surrounded by an aura of mystery and excitement at all times, and rightfully so. You never knew exactly what would happen, but it was a safe bet that something might happen, or could happen, and any moment – and often, it did. Never in my life have I ever met another person who had that kind of personal energy and presence ... and humility. He never took credit for "doing" these things, but would only acknowledge that many strange events seemed to occur when he was present. He called his attitude "Between-ness" and said it was the formula for creation, available to anyone and everyone, if they took the time, and had the desire to discover its secret.

Rose had an uncommon quality, a mysterious something that made him unique and totally different from everyone else. He could absorb anything and everything without reaction, recrimination, or surprise, yet he was also the most sensitive person I've ever met. He was always "there", no matter how off-the-wall or outlandish your thoughts and ideas seemed to be. The word preposterous was unknown to him. He could handle whatever life presented without being affected; like a visit from a young pregnant woman, a real witch, on the run from her coven, or a visit from another young lady, who, by her own admission, "had a demon". Another time, during a crowded weekend seminar session, a young man began to howl and growl, like a rabid dog. People around him were terrified, but Rose took it all in stride. He calmly stood in front of the tortured youth, and in a commanding voice, told whatever was inside him to leave. Almost immediately the boy became quiet, and pensive, as one who just woke up from a dream. As always, Rose was unflappable and totally fearless, capable of bringing order into any kind of chaos.

An astounding example of this "Between-ness" was when Rose literally saw a benign growth inside someone's body. As he was sitting in meditation with a few students he focused on each person in turn for a few moments with his eyes closed, as he usually did during these silent sessions. On this occasion, he said afterwards to the woman that he saw what looked like "a string of rosary beads across her chest" through his closed eyelids. A few days later, when she had a chest x-ray, the films showed a small granuloma, much like a small bead similar to what Rose had seen in her lung. It seems impossible, but it's true, and just one of many other incidents equally as impressive, that happened over the years, all of which seemed to defy explanation.

Sometimes, he could even accurately predict the future. After arriving at the Ashram in Washington, DC, before opening the front door he said, "I bet I can walk right through the house and those guys won't even see me." The apartment was a long and narrow row home with all the rooms in a straight line from

front to back. One of the two group members who were in the living room later told the story that they were waiting on Rose, when suddenly the door opened, and closed. The fellow said, "Was that Rose that just walked through here?" He said it felt like there was a "finger" on the front of his mind that kept him from seeing what was happening, right in front of his eyes. Meanwhile, Rose and his travelling companion were in the kitchen at back of the house, having a good chuckle.

Another time we were travelling in a car caravan from Benwood to Cleveland for a weekend Chautauqua. Rose was in the lead car, driven by one of the guys who lived on the Farm. The next car was being driven by the wife of one of the guys in the car with Rose. Now Rose was never one to dilly dally on the highway, often exceeding the speed limit with a watchful eye. So it was on this day he encouraged the driver to "step on it so we get there on time." After a few miles, Rose noticed the following car was lagging behind. He said, "I'll tell you exactly what Jeanne is saying right now: I'll not drive one mile an hour over sixty-five!" At a rest stop further on, Rose's statement was verified exactly to the word, by someone riding in the trailing car. How he did these things was anybody's guess, but to him, the explanation was simple: between-ness was the answer. He talked about "holding the head" in the exact midpoint between total desire and total indifference, and then forgetting the entire idea or project. This was a refinement of an old formula for creation: "To know, to will, to dare, and to be silent." Rose once said, "There's things I'd like to see happen, just because they can." He wasn't out for personal gain, fame, fortune, or even recognition, but just to witness what was possible for the human mind to accomplish. If ever anybody was a mystic, it was Richard Rose.

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The Perfect Psychology

What set Rose apart from the professionals in the psychological field was his point of reference in Absolute Truth, and a willingness to give solid advice and point to a path of action, a backing away from things in life that were detrimental to mental clarity and health. He was very critical of modern psychology, saying it had failed in its attempts to be scientific, and had succumbed to the politically popular ideas of the times in order to get funding and supporters. Rose's position was that a perfect psychology would lead to truth, but mainstream psychology was confused and divergent, as evidenced by the many different points of view in various schools and therapies that often were in direct conflict with one another.

Much of Rose's work and interest lay in the domain of psychology, and he claimed that a perfect psychology would lead to real sanity and Truth. However, what Rose meant by the word psychology was entirely different from what most people, especially the professionals in the field, had in mind when they used the term. The fact that his psychological system and advice brought dozens and dozens of burned out young people back from the depths of depression and confusion, in a relatively short time, was solid proof that he understood the mind in a different and superior way.

He based his psychology on intuition and direct experience. He said a true psychologist should be able to step inside the head of another person, and think with their thoughts. Only then would the psychologist truly understand their problem, and be able to prescribe the cure. This may sound absurd and smack of "magical thinking", but so many people were healed over the years by following his advice,

there can be no doubt of the method's veracity. Rose took psychology further by spending years looking into strange occurrences, healings, miracles, mind-reading, and other events at the edges of what we usually call normal human experience, and taking the pains to delineate the psychological aspects of how these things are accomplished. Amazingly enough, on any given day, he could also demonstrate many of the things he talked about ... "if it was supposed to happen", he said.

A person must "get his house in order" or become a good householder, Rose said, before any esoteric spiritual work could be done. His systematic, logical approach to life and the spiritual search was very uncommon in those days, and still is today too. Rose did not ascribe to the "everything that feels good is okay" approach that is prevalent in psychology and spirituality. He said this attitude was destructive to the individual while it simultaneously created more patients for psychologists and psychiatrists. Rose believed in conservation of energy, hard physical work, along with study and meditation as the best method to "get your head on straight". Growth, he said, was not the result of positive thinking, affirmations, or wishful thinking. He insisted that true "being" develops from action and effort applied in a direction. He called the process becoming a "Vector", a term he borrowed from physics. He was always reminding us that we had to act, and not just believe or think we were doing something. One time at the Farm, a small group of us were standing around a car that listed sadly, the result of a nail in the rear tire. One young man was trying to assemble the jack when Rose walked by. "You guys all want to go to Heaven," he said, "and you can't even change a tire!" He laughed outrageously as he walked down the road shaking his head. Such was the sting of his humor, letting us know none too gently, how far we had to go. Today, however, there are scores of successful men and women in diverse fields who attribute their success to Rose's ideas, personal advice, and example; proof his system worked.

The purpose of spiritual work was not therapy, but to find or become Truth, even though therapy could occur, and it often did, along the way. I personally witnessed healing and growth in dozens of people – including myself – who had come into the Pyramid Zen Society (a name taken to fulfill requirements in order to meet on Kent State University campus) suffering from the effects of drugs and other traumatic lifestyles. As a result of association with Rose, they became successful lawyers, scientists, CPA's, professors, psychologists, business owners, authors, and later, spiritual teachers. If Rose advised and embodied anything, it was ACTION – egoless action. As is said in some Zen circles, the formula was to do without being the doer. This was the ultimate state of mind that would lead to achievement, success and change of being. On his psychological method, Rose had this to say: "I'd come to realize that if a man is ever going to grasp anything it won't be by learning. His being has to change. You are what you do, not what you know. A man never learns; he becomes. To become, you must find ways and means to change your entire state of mind. This in turn will lead to a change of being."

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A Grand Overview

Rose had a distinct perspective that gave him a grand overview and incredible unity of knowledge about life and the human mind. He could reach out effortlessly and lasso a distant piece of information, diverse facts, ideas, and concepts, and weave them into the conversation at the exact moment they were needed. In informal group settings, he was like an orchestra conductor deftly involving on each person present, unexpectedly at times, with humor, questions, and discourse – all in the true spirit of unselfish

friendship. There was nothing like it, anywhere. Rose embodied all the Jungian archetypes, and at any given time, in any situation, he was the Teacher, the Father, the Brother, the Sage, the Trickster, the Hero, the Child, the Magician, the Explorer, the Mentor, or the Friend ... always; he was the Friend, even though it might seem otherwise when the heat was on.

By his own definition, Rose was an "iconoclast" a label he lived up to on a daily basis, constantly mounting a barrage of criticism aimed at organized religion, politics, banking, psychology, psychiatry, education, and especially the tremendous amount of advertising we are subjected to constantly from morning till night. He said the four horsemen of the apocalypse were not pestilence, war, famine and death, but rather authoritative ignorance, hedonism, enforced conditioning of the individual, and enforced conditioning of the masses. Rose was always on guard against the thousands of little ways in which we are hypnotized in our daily lives, a vigilance he hoped to instill in us before it was too late.

It was from Rose I first heard the word "ersatz", which he used in reference to many of our food products, among other things. He decried the use of a pretty woman on the curve of a fender to sell a car, rather than the worth of its motor. He asserted that the real reason we go to college is to get a better job, so we could get a better mate, all the while insisting we ask ourselves constantly why we do the things we do. In short, he was forever trying to "poke us in the eye" or wake us up to our mechanical natures. Admittedly, it was a job of major proportions, but a job he accepted with sincerity and determination. He said "What a guy needs is the wisdom of a sixty year old man when you're twenty-five. I'm trying to age a few young people."

He was relentless in his quest to reach out to more people, hoping to contact a few who would find what he called the ultimate mental experience, or Enlightenment. It's hard to imagine a world without cell phones, computers, compact discs, and social media, but Rose's philosophy was spread using the telephone, letters, face-to-face discussions, and public talks. He shunned almost all modern high-tech devices in the process, saying "If you want Direct Mind, you have to avoid technology." This seemed like very strange, impossible advice to follow, but Rose's own incredible intuitive and psychic abilities indicated he knew what he was talking about.

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Final Reflections

It is hard to remember a time in my life when I didn't know Richard Rose and it sometimes seems as if I didn't exist at all prior to coming into contact with him. Unlike many of the pseudo-gurus of today who remain aloof from their students, Rose welcomed one-on-one relationships. His door was always open, and he was available to everyone. He answered letters personally, talked on the phone with students, and never took a dime for the effort. He often said there was no general prescription he could give to every person that would guarantee success in spiritual work. Consequently he advised each person differently, sometimes gently cajoling, other times using humor, and at times, intensely serious confrontation. He seemed to know the intricacies of a person's psychological state and was able to navigate the shoals between being ineffective and overwhelming. He created circumstances that would show a person themselves, and at the same time, bring out the best in them.

It's been said that those who have discovered Reality, or Essence, reflect the Light like none other. Rose was among them; that much is certain. Like a large, mirrored globe of yesterday, slowly spinning from the ceiling of a ballroom, he effortlessly cast light in every direction. He showed us our many selves, in our many poses and vanities. And he showed us so much more than that. I have never met, nor do I ever expect to meet anyone else who can do this with such grace and elegance. He was a kind man who truly loved people. As I look back on my life, I'm quite certain if I had not met Richard Rose, I would not be here today to tell this story. Thank you, Mr. Rose, for the gift of life.

"I am a mirror with my back to humanity, Vainly lighting a direction, For puppets to pick up threads and contact, Strings to the Absolute..."

"The Mirror"

— Richard Rose

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