

# Richard Rose's Psychology of the Observer: The Path to Reality Through the Self

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All of this preparation brings us to the central issue in the Work: self-definition. What does it mean to define the self? What is truly meant when one says "I am"? Is it not enough to just "be"? How does one go about defining oneself; the one who is "being"? We are said to be created in God's image—but who precisely is the "we"? It obviously cannot be the body or human personality. Furthermore, as we are in fact more likely to create God in our own image, so long as we maintain a false imagining of ourselves, can we not help but concoct an equally fictitious God as well; one subject to the fallible human emotions and desires we project onto It? What of us is of God?

It is often said that it is important to "be true to yourself", yet there is a critical point being overlooked in this advice: it is necessary to know who "yourself" IS, or you might well end up being true to a false self; "actualizing" a self who is not really you. This would be like the joke about the psychologist telling the client: "I have some good news and bad news for you. The good news is that you have a strong, healthy, well-adjusted ego. The bad news is that it has no basis in reality." Or even worse: to be dying and watching someone else's life flashing before one's eyes!

Along these lines, someone once made the remark: "You are who you pretend to be...so be careful who you pretend to be." There is the common principle, encountered both in psychological theory and our personal experience, that there is an outer persona or social role based upon conditioning, and a real, inner self, underneath it all. This is true psychodynamically, but not existentially. We may be flattering ourselves by claiming more of an identity than we have really earned. In a pure sense, there may be no "real" human being apart from the "unreal" actor. (This could be qualified by saying the "real" human self is our naturally intended psychological programming and the "false" self is its unfortunate ego-projection, with all its attendant delusions. While it is certainly ideal to be congruent, for the outer personality to be true to the healthy promptings of this inner voice, from another perspective this entire experience of selfhood—right or wrong—is seen to be on the same plane of consciousness and not the true "I" for which we are searching.) It is all on the record. It is all equally "real" (or unreal). *All is seen*. You are what you do, as Rose has said. If we lie, we are the lie. This is also why the simplistic philosophy of "be who you are" is inadequate, or even dangerous. If we indiscriminately assume that we are whoever we experience ourself to be, we may be identifying with pathology as well as virtue. Without correct self-definition, our lives have no basis in fact. As did Merrell-Wolff, Rose declares our perspective on reality is inverted: "Only the Essence is real, but to us it is nebulous. It is we who are nebulous, struggling from one shadowy dimension to another" ([Rose, 1979c, p. 17](#)).

In light of this, some obvious questions come up. Rose asks: "Is life really worth living? If (the individual) does not know who is living—who *or what* is taking the most profit from his pleasure-experiences? Is he really the thing that enjoys, or is he programmed into believing he enjoys?" ([Rose, 1979c, p. 81](#)). Not only do we wonder who is living, but we must ask: who is it who is faced with oblivion? For, after all, what is the value of life—even a healthy, successful, and "happy" one—when only death is certain? What

is worthwhile? Is a person to be nothing more than "a moment of consciousness between two oblivions," as Rose taunts?

We are taught how to live, but not why. We are mechanically compelled to choose goals, values, and rewards, and to revel in their attainment, yet the nature of the self that has these things and experiences their fulfillment is never properly defined, nor its genuineness challenged. We trust in our ability to decide on a course of action or a bauble to pursue, but never stop to question why we are doing it. What are our premises? What generates our values and desires? Who is it who identifies with values and desires and is victimized by their compulsion?

In "new thought," metaphysical circles, we are encouraged to "create your own reality," and a partial understanding of qualified techniques or levers is offered to enable one to manipulate some of the factors and props in this dimension according to one's wishes. However, the thrill in this new-found power can cause one to overlook the issue of WHO it is who is creating things and what is determining one's motives behind one's efforts to determine conditions. Can a self who is undefined and thus possibly invalid create reality, or could any such skillful legerdemain be any more than projection of one's vanity and ignorance onto the walls of one's cave? Would not "reality" be what IS? Can anything the ego creates be considered real? Can a dimension that is so moldable by mind-power be considered entirely real? Would not the acknowledgement of its malleability dissuade one from taking much pride in its conquest? Should not the real priority then be to find the fact-status of one's essential identity and the underlying nature of the world we see?

As Gurdjieff explained, we are tricked into believing in a false sense of personal, unified, consistent identity, whereas we are really little more than an on-going association of impulses, conditioning, reactions, and identifications. We view mental patients afflicted with multiple personality disorder (what is often misunderstood by the general public to be schizophrenia) and feel sorry for their plight, while never suspecting that we are looking at only more extreme forms of ourselves.

Our current conviction of selfhood can be likened to a sports team. Someone says: "I've been a Yankees' fan all my life—they're the best," implying that this team has been one, constant entity all along. The reality is that the players on the team come and go over the years; after 20 years it is an entirely different "team." The only thing constant is the team name, the uniform, and the home-city. The personal, biological equivalent of this is that throughout life the cells in the body continually die and are replaced by new cells; the complete cycle taking seven years, after which time there is actually an entirely different body. Yet, we still identify with this body and its programmed personality as "me," because it has the same name and social security number. What selfhood is constant? Can a self that is not constant be considered genuine? What does an amnesic old person have in common with the infant the person once was? It is lazy, dishonest philosophy to nervously claim: "Well...it's all me." What is the self?

With all this in mind, the core question, "Who am I?" might be misleading. It does not imply the assumption that one really is the person one is experiencing oneself to be, but simply does not know this person well enough yet, and so needs to become more familiar with one's likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows, etc. This is not the goal of self-definition—although, knowing the person whom one "is" is certainly an integral part of the whole process of discovery.

But there is more. One needs to seriously consider the possibility that the self (small "s") is not who one really is. The point here is not to just believe this alternative either as a concept, because it sounds "cosmic," but to inquire into this question further to determine the truth of the matter.

We generally assume ourselves to be a body with a name and history, with thoughts, feelings, convictions, and experiences associated with and derived from this body. Rose, as do all his traditional peers, states this is a false self-definition. He says we reflexively respond to our feeble questioning of our identity by trusting in what seems to be: "At first, the face in the mirror smiles back reassuringly." The seeming solidity and promise of this identity may seduce one into a false sense of security. We base not only our identity on this physical entity, but gauge the nature of reality by this body's sensual perception and experiencing of life.

Rose says we should not trust this: "Man is not going to find reality if he accepts that which his body tells him, or that the body is all of him". The body is certainly important as a foundation, a vehicle, and a tentative reference point for beginning one's investigations, but he is saying it is a mistake to worship the body as the end-all of the quest for selfhood or that its experiences and perceptions provide infallible data to determine what is true.

One of the most obvious reasons for this philosophical objection to our wholly identifying with the body is simply that the body will die. Meaning, or validity, inherently implies a state of permanence, of indestructibility, for it to be fully real. Whatever can die and *can be seen to die* cannot be the final answer abiding outside the stream of time. As all experience for the human being is imprinted in some synaptic or organic form, what form of immortality could we contemplate once the recording medium for these memories disintegrates? Even in cases of severe amnesia or degenerative nerve disease associated with senility, when experience-memory is lost, can that "person" be said to still exist? What is the reality of that person's previous life, joys, victories, loves, etc. when the memory of them is gone? Even if such data is also preserved in some spiritual form (the Akashic Record, some say), once the ego-self that identifies with the experiencing physical person is gone from the scene, who would remain to appreciate this completed lifetime? Objective meaning requires an objective Appreciator. The only hope for immortality would then be to adjust to an after-death state that was one of awareness only.

The significance of the apparent inevitability of death in regards to self-definition is that even the highest wisdom does no good if it rots along with the brain and nervous system, or DNA-bearing chromosomes that contains it. As such, those metaphysical systems that aim at personal development of the relative, mundane mind, or religious doctrines that promise salvation for the individual human being, can be of no ultimate value if the person who would be the recipient of these eternal benefits is made of transient stuff. Rose comments: "These eminent states that we reach, all the way up to Cosmic Consciousness, are still experienced by an animal. But are we really animals?" (lecture, 1976). Likewise, to speculate or even rely upon a perfected, spiritualized body resurrecting in heaven must be recognized as an evident bit of rationalization for holding onto one's Earthly self in some form. Why would one need a body in what could only be realistically regarded as a non-relative dimension? Does heaven have gravity, air, food, plumbing, etc.?

To find Reality, the seeker must find that part of the self that really IS; the part that remains when all else is gone. To merely believe that one has a divine, immortal soul is insufficient, if the one who holds the

belief will die, and this soul is not discovered in time. If this postulated soul does not know itself in life, by what justification can we confidently assume it would automatically know itself in death?

One of the first things you would find is that you don't exist, especially as you think you are. You go take a look in the mirror and you are very happy with what you see there: "Oh, look at what God piled on this earth to grace it and make other people jealous." But after awhile, you realize that you are a blob and you are waiting for them to dig a hole to put it in so it won't smell the place up, and that is all there is to you as far as your logical proof is concerned. Now: if there is something else—how do you find it, and if you find it, how do you define it? In terms of the body which doesn't exist? ([Rose, 1985, p. 51](#)).

He is once again confronting the seeker with the fact that, as we know ourselves now, we have no valid ground or essence to our being, but only live on presumption founded upon an insubstantial ego which was wholly created by programming and circumstances we did not choose (this receptive "we" itself being nothing more than the identification with what was chosen for "us"), despite whatever vain metaphysical notions we may entertain about having "created" our life-story in between incarnations. This latter conviction still begs the question as to who it is who is mapping out the human experience to come, on what is the value-system governing these decisions based, and is the self then this script-writing soul or the authority to which this soul answers? Can even this soul be watched—by what?? Nonetheless, the undefined person, "...struts across the stage of life and bravely postulates himself" ([Rose, 1978, p. 39](#)).

This is not to imply that the ego is wholly negative or useless. It has its place. As discussed in an earlier reference to Gurdjieff, he regarded the ego as something that could ideally be established as a willful, truth-seeking philosophical "I", in place of the collection of fragmented, false "I's" the person really is doomed to be otherwise. Rose also acknowledges the functional value of such a philosophical "I" while still on the path, but is very strict to warn that even this should never be mistakenly regarded as the real self, as all egos, finally—the seeker too—are seen to be false and to be eliminated or escaped.

The search for valid selfhood and the true perspective on life that is possible only from this vantage point should be the rightful domain of psychology, yet it has historically failed to address this matter in any depth. For the most part (excepting Frankl, Jung, Assagioli, Maslow, and a few other extremists), the field of psychology has ignored the issue of meaning and identity, or misdefined it, by reducing it to strictly utilitarian, socio-behavioral terms. However, Rose claims this is a serious dereliction of duty and the original objective of psychological investigations has been largely lost. He claims: "Psychological discovery is equal to spiritual discovery, but the present directions of psychological discovery will not bring us even a proper self-definition, much less any Self-Realization" (Rose, unpublished group papers).

The common testimony of mystics has always been that there is one true desire behind all desires and pursuits in every person: the Self-longing for the conscious experience of its own being, through "us", the human being. The real nature of the higher Intuition is the recognition of and response to this yearning.

Another common assertion made in all spiritual teachings is that the basic problem at the root of all our other problems is that of our having a case of mistaken identity. All suffering is due to our experiencing life through an erroneous sense of self, from an incorrect vantage point, processed through a defective

mind, and seen with clouded vision. Correlated with this is the promise that when one arrives at the realization of the true Self, all is seen to be perfect, and the suffering of the now non-existent "individual" to have been a state of delusion.

However, before being able to find this Self, which at this point must be admitted to be only an intuitive concept and not a reality, one must fully understand what the nature of one's current state is and how it came to be. We need to recognize all the ways in which our sense of self has been distorted and how our notion of valid identity has been a rash presumption.

One common example with which most people are familiar is the difficulty in maintaining and following through with a vow. Whether the vow is for an honorable marriage, celibacy, breaking a habit, starting a new discipline, or any other challenge, if one is not a single, unified self with an undivided will, the fulfillment of the vow will be fraught with conflict, as one "I" will be making the vow, and another, later "I" will be unable or unwilling to live up to it. The mental trick of procrastination is another common example. By saying: "I'll do it tomorrow" or "I'll be stronger, more capable, more responsible, etc. later," one is deliberately dividing oneself into two people: one who is now indulging in some weakness or compromise, and the idealized "other" to whom one is transferring one's work or burden for later; this dynamic, agreeable "someone else" not being regarded as oneself. What is most important is that we can watch ourselves playing this game, or negotiating such intra-psychic conflicts.

We are seduced from the moment of birth into a false sense of identification through language and social convention and may never in a lifetime become aware of how our pristine minds were sidetracked into false categories that simulate reality. Mommy asks: "Are you hungry (cold, tired, etc.)?," and right away the child is taught to identify the bodily sensation of hunger, temperature, fatigue, etc. as being of oneself, rather than its being only the experience of the body that one is somehow monitoring. Someone asks: "How old are you?"; the slyly imposed implication being: "When did your identification with this body begin?" We learn to distinguish mine from yours, winning from losing, us from them; each lie being unsuspectingly internalized, until one's entire life and identity become one big lie.

Another presumptuous question some ponder is: Does one's life begin at conception or birth? Yet, they fail to specify: Whose life? What is born? Where do we draw the line between the mother's life and the child's, and why? Is the self the body or is it something that identifies with the body? Is what is identified with the body only an ego-mind that derives from the body itself? Could it be there are no individual lives that begin and end, but there is only Life, whole and undivided, and the awareness of it, including the awareness of assorted pompous ghosts who believe they are someone, even possibly "divine"?

Ram Dass once made the following astute comment: "There really is no such thing as 'us' and 'them'—there is only 'us'. The only distinction that can be made between people is between those of us who know we are 'us' and those of us who don't!" (lecture, 1982). At least one sub-culture within the Rastafari sect in Jamaica goes a step further: they incorporate this understanding into their very language, thus reflecting a living perception and not merely an idealistic concept. The one speaking in conversation refers to oneself to as "I," but all other people—whether "you," "he/she," or "they/them"—are referred to as "the-I." Everyone is "I" in some form; there is no word for any "other." This indicates a quality of holistic consciousness different from our norm of fragmentation and alienation.

As admirable as this perspective is, the exact meaning of even such a humane "I" is still uncertain. The infant that soiled its diapers is usually not proudly owned years later as being "me", yet at what age do we become "us"? Where do we draw the line between who we were and who we are? In taking careful inventory of oneself, one will find several different levels and categories of identification for this "I" occurring simultaneously:

- The body as a whole entity.
  - Specific body parts or sensations (stomach, sex organs, toothache).
  - One's psychological makeup, or "the person" (personality, attitudes, desires, egos, feelings, reactions).
  - One's mental processes, or "the thinker" (values, judgments, beliefs, evaluations).
  - Assorted social and functional roles throughout the day (spouse, parent, child, employee, athlete).
  - More consistently maintained roles (black, Jew, American, man, woman).
  - Identification with possessions or projections (my car, my mate, my appearance, my guru).
  - Identification with one's circumstances, events, interpersonal relationships (the "story of life") and for some:
    - The mental ego of being a "seeker" or religious pilgrim
    - The mental experience of observation, discernment, and awareness
    - The dualistic spiritual experience of "communion with God," "finding one's soul", or "being in Heaven."
- The final Self or Absolute that contains all of these fixations is not yet realized.

It is difficult to not identify with the body, yet one can look at the issue from unconventional angles to disrupt the usual equating of oneself with the body's experiences. The questions can be pondered: "If my brain was transplanted into someone else's body, who would 'I' then be? If my parents had instead married other spouses and each had children by these other unions, who would 'I' be? If my body (including my brain with its memories) was exactly cloned and there was then two of me, which one would 'I' be? If my neck was severed on a guillotine, would my head be chopped off—or would my body be chopped off?" Odd questions, admittedly, but contemplation of such koans may result in a different understanding of who one is and is not.

Most religious or metaphysically inclined people assume their real identity is that of a "soul" incarnating in a body for the purpose of experience, education, and evolution. Even if this is true, the question remains as to where this soul-identity leaves off and the identification with experience begins—where is the line drawn? Is there such a thing as an individual soul at all? What we generally call a soul may be the misidentification of the impersonal Self with a cluster of experience, which is personified as the ego and projected into the ether as a spiritualized human. Is the soul the face at the end of the ray of the Spiritual Sun, or Atman, and the ego is a mask on that face? To look at this from another angle: in cases of out-of-body or after-death experiences—who is being out of the body or experiencing this visit to death? (This is a good metaphor, though, for the real, final experience.) In what is this non-physical self floating, then? In what is this larger space? Does the one who is out-of-body think, feel, and perceive? If these contents of the experience can be seen, is the real self then the out-of-body experiencer—or the seer of this?

Related to all this, someone once made the remark that to die being no different than the last time one died is a great shame and waste. Should this be true, it requires us to focus in on the issue of what

precisely it is that reincarnates and what exactly it is supposed to accomplish through successive lifetimes to show a profit. Is there a distinct and separate entity that ties together these hypothesized, different lifetimes, or is there only one final Viewer of all life? As the seeker does not know the truth of the matter at this point in the search, one can only recall Rose's stern question: "What are you doing?" and hope to be doing something that holds some promise of one's finding the answer. His emphasis in the teaching on developing "being" is not to be mistaken for the perfecting of a reincarnating "soul" until it becomes Godlike, but rather the functional efforts of an admitted pseudo-entity within a dream that aims at cracking the cosmic egg and realizing the ever-existent aware Self it intuitively is outside of it.

We are not certain who we really are, but we can begin to take inventory of everything we are not: all our egos, experiences, categories, and concepts. Death will strip all these from us anyway, revealing whatever is left that may survive death. As one witty fellow said: "Life is a process of losing our illusions, until finally, we lose the illusion that we're alive" (Brilliant, Potshots). It is more promising to deliberately begin this discrimination while we are still able to do something about it and expedite the discovery of what remains.

As always, Rose alerts us to a paradox within a paradox. Despite the harshness implied and skepticism encouraged in many of these pointed questions asking us to define our identity, he also asks: "Yet (are we not) different from other humans? Behind this apparent external difference, may there not (also) be an internal uniqueness; a part that is separate from all, yet which is not alone or lonely in the face of infinity?" ([Rose, 1979c, p. 80](#)).

At this point in the quest, the truest definition of one's identity can only be: amnesic consciousness. In one's most honest self-reflection, the seeker realizes that one's highest point of reference is the awareness of the sea of unknowing in which the troubled, doubting questioner exists and labors to answer itself (as a possibly fictional self). The final Witness of this melodramatic scene is still unknown.

This brings up a crucial point; one that is rarely if ever addressed, even in esoteric seeking. It is one of the key principles in the Albigen System and a valuable new contribution to this field: **the point-of-reference**. Its meaning is difficult to convey because to understand it requires that one recognize one's entire sense of self and experience of life as being somewhat erroneous and not absolutely valid "as is." We do not realize this now. All knowing, seeing, feeling, choosing, meditating, etc. presupposes a "self" who is the subject of these experiences and that this self as a baseline or arbiter is infallible, neutral, and fundamentally "true." This bottom line is almost never questioned nor examined by anyone, in any field of research. It is taken for granted, and all attention is focused instead upon defining the object of study or experiencing the experience. Yet, without a valid point-of-reference as a foundation, all perceptions, assessments, conclusions, etc. based on it become unreliable, if not worthless for serious research.

An example of this is the perspective on history as it is taught in different countries or sub-cultures. The white, European male view of world events will differ from the African or Chinese or feminist. Columbus is considered to have "discovered" North America—even though native peoples had lived there for thousands of years. Thus, a variation on the standard phenomenological question arises: Does life experience officially happen if there is no white man around to witness and acknowledge it? The Bible had exclusively designated the mid-East as the center of human religious history, yet was God any less real or sought for by the peoples of India at the time? As another example, the descriptive rationale for a

war will vary according to each participant's motives, while each claims absolute righteousness, as if endorsed by God. The equivalent on the personal level is the reflexive, egocentric self-justification of our evaluation of reality. We assume we are the standard of mental clarity, measuring all others from our reference point as the baseline. We need to consider the possibility that we have an incomplete and erroneous perception of reality, and that compared to the state that could be called genuine sanity, we are insane.

This becomes especially important in esoteric research, as the focus of study is not only upon the objects of desired knowledge or attainment, but also the subject who is pursuing or inquiring after these things. We do not only study experience, but also the experiencer. We cannot presume to define God without first defining the God-seeker. To understand the meaning of point-of-reference involves being able to "see" one's view of existence—including one's "own" life within it—from a radically different vantage point.

Acknowledging this principle is particularly indispensable in meditation. Rose raises a critical question as a way of making this point. He comes in from an unexpected angle and may surprise those who assume they already know what meditation is: "We must define our basic point-of-reference. In meditation, we are advised to 'go within'. But these words are not sufficient. How do you go within if you do not know *where* 'within' is? How do you go within if you do not know *who* is going 'within'?" ([Rose, 1985, p. 295](#)). In other words, there is no inside/outside or me/not-me without a point-of-reference to use as the subjective basis for measurement and for thus delineating the boundary lines.

This is another reason why Rose stresses the primary issue in the spiritual search as being precise self-definition, rather than the search for God, bliss, power, knowledge, or peace, and in fact these other goals being meaningless, so long as the one searching for them remains unknown. He is claiming that all religious, philosophical, and psychological systems must be recognized as fundamentally inadequate when it is seen they lack a valid and provable point-of-reference. The search for Truth must also be a search for the real Self, which can be the only true point-of-reference.

This describes the course psychology must take in order for it to be a legitimate spiritual science. The Self as point-of-reference is what will lead to answers to the important psychological questions posed earlier: What is thought and what is the relation of thought to the body? (meaning: where does thought occur?); Where does experience occur? Where is it seen?; What is sanity?; Is consciousness the same as awareness?; and Is there an awareness that survives the death of the body? Rose differs from behavioral approaches to psychology, conceptual approaches to philosophy, and devotional approaches to religion by earnestly recommending: "We should start with consciousness or awareness as the points-of-reference" ([Rose, 1985, p. 309](#)).

The point-of-reference can be likened to the cursor on a computer video-screen. It is where the subject or experiencer actually is within that computer-dimension and is the focal or matrix point from where one works. The seeker is that cursor in one's mental dimension of experience, following out his/her program; encountering other distinct seekers, who are following out their respective programs. (The further metaphor of: "Who is watching the entire screen, directing all cursors and manipulating all variables?" is also to be kept in mind.)



We immediately run into a paradox once again. We are attempting to find the Self, which is the only valid point-of-reference, yet we are searching for that Self from an invalid or only relative point-of-reference that cannot serve as an adequate basis for such investigation. Rose describes how this is a problem in any attempt at serious philosophical or metaphysical inquiry:

Most logic is vanity, however we must approach problems in a sensible manner. In spiritual or esoteric fields, logic finds loose footing, because logic requires a point-of-reference to make it valid, yet any relative or earthly foundation becomes unstable where we observe it in regard to its ultimate reality in relation to the subtle dimensions of the mind or spirit. ([Rose, 1986, p. 42](#)).

At this point, one is tempted to quit and pray for a Savior to show up. Yet, what this above admission really accomplishes is that it confronts all the false points-of-reference which one might be inclined to trust, and forces one to work on refining that quality of being-awareness that Rose says can be the only valid point-of-reference. Paradoxically, the very work at this difficult task does refine the definition of the self doing the inquiring. All this is not merely an abstract, theoretical concern. It directly relates to one's very understanding of what spirituality entails. For example, the principle of reincarnation is often taught as a central feature in many spiritual doctrines, and there are people who claim to recall their past lives in a hypnotic regression state or are told of their past lives by psychics. Rose does not emphasize this principle in his teaching partially because it leaves out the delicate matter of who it is who is reincarnating and benefiting from the succession of lives. To merely say it is the "soul," but without directly realizing this soul as one's point-of-reference, leaves it a useless topic, however fascinating the data received may be.

Advaita Vedanta teaches that reincarnation is only true for those who assume they are an individual entity—however rarified in substance—and insist on believing this "person" must continue throughout lifetimes. In actuality, however, reincarnation is said to not really exist simply because the one who is allegedly reincarnating does not really exist. No one is incarnating now. There is no discrete, individual experienter at the core of life-experience who is separate from it. There is only experience—and the awareness of it. What could be said to "reincarnate," in a sense, is the continuation of effects from prior causes manifesting in new forms. Yet, even this understanding is dualistic and linear. In truth, the interconnected system of life is one seamless unit and in this timeless, dynamic flux, everything happens at once, not in sequence by isolated fragments in juxtaposition. *There are no lifetimes with people in them*—there is only undivided life experiencing its self-contained, balanced, wholeness. So, even though this homeostatic mechanism may be considered as karma, no one "has" it. Who is the "you" who would reap what has been sown? As was earlier speculated, there may be an individualized awareness in manifestation, but paradoxically, this awareness—much like the relation of a drop of water to the ocean or a ray of light to the sun—is of one essence.

Rose added another twist to this theme in response to a questioner who optimistically referred to the principle that people must go through the cycles of death and rebirth in order to continue learning and growing, etc. Yet, what he picked up behind the question was the veiled desire to maintain some subtle sense of personal continuity and postpone the total negation of selfhood:

You're hanging onto the fence. You have to let go of what you think things are. (Regarding) the idea that there's no birth unless there is dying—it's possible that "you" may not experience birth. That the only

reason why people do experience birth is they never realized they could stay dead. They maybe feel compelled to play the game; to go back on the stage. ([Rose, 1985, p. 88-89](#)).

He does not deny it is possible to tap into the memory-experience of other lifetimes. He only questions if that lifetime "belongs" to the one (believed to be the person) doing the viewing. He suggests the metaphor of there being a central film library in another dimension outside our seeming sequence of time, which contains the lifetimes of everyone who has ever lived or will live, on reels of film. Our great, great, grandchildren's lives are already recorded on the reels as well. He says that what may be happening when "past lives" are witnessed is that one is genuinely seeing a lifetime that has occurred, but that one is rashly assuming this life was "mine", when in fact it was not, as neither the one watching it is a real, distinct, permanent entity, nor does that lifetime have a unique core or soul in it as its owner—unless one equates "soul" with a ray of impersonal awareness. The experience-stream of life is all a form of consciousness, yet consciousness is no more "ours" than is air, just because we breathe it in. There is only awareness of it.

This same issue arises in regards to the attempt to attain "liberation" by any number of methods of meditative practice: what are the precise boundaries of the entity who is being liberated and from what is it being liberated? Perhaps the lesson to be learned through many lifetimes is that no real self was ever living and evolving. Realizing that no one was ever imprisoned is liberation. As an additional note on this subject, another reason why Rose does not encourage speculation or dependence upon reincarnation is because it can too easily be used as a rationalization to avoid effort in the present. If there are hundreds of lifetimes available ahead of us, and possibly more advantageous ones at that, why not procrastinate and do the harder work later? One may feel buffered against the sting of death, not due to wisdom, but the pseudo-certainty of conceptualized continuity. This belief allows one to hold onto the security of the "me" indefinitely and never have to confront the beckoning oblivion. One can deny the discomfort of a meaningless existence in the now. Rose says that all we honestly know is today, not tomorrow. There might not be a later. Should one risk a bid for eternity on an idea picked up in a book? Besides, there is no justified reason to assume one will be any more capable or inclined to face the issues that must be faced in some hoped for future lifetime than now. We may reincarnate as a weakling or coward next time too.

There is a final, more subtle reason for this dismissal of one of the most cherished, standard principles in most esoteric teachings, and it relates to all that has been said so far about non-duality, becoming the truth, and direct realization. Although Rose does refer to progression, signposts, mental refinement, and such, he is not suggesting that Reality is the culmination of eons of personal development. As later material will explain, he sees all of relative existence as one, interconnected tableau—and Reality is at a right angle to it (so to speak), not the highest point on that plane. He is saying that one does not need to know about past lives or about a million other details of esoteric lore. God (or Truth) was no more real or near in the past than now, nor will it be in the future after massive efforts at self-betterment have been made. He states that to isolate the essence of oneself now is the crucial task, as it is the same beckoning Reality, always. Accomplishing this does take some time—until arriving at that "place" where there is no time or progress.

With this perspective in mind, spiritual maturity can be partially assessed by whether one regards the prospect of reincarnation as a joy, promising further delights—or a threat, signifying failure and further

imprisonment. Clinging to the hope for reincarnation can be more an indication of unacknowledged materialism, egotism, and fear than spirituality.

These comments about the insubstantiality of the ego-self run counter to the common, human desire to be effective "doers" and masters in one's own life. There is, once again, a paradox in this. Rose does, of course, strongly urge the seeker to become a dynamic, unified vector of truth, fighting against adversity from within and without, and remaining determined until the end. Yet, he also says that as we are now, "Man does not move as much as he is moved" ([Rose, 1982, p. 138](#)). We like to believe that we make choices, satisfy desires, assert values, and such, but Rose sees people as simply being the end result of all they have been made to be.

There is another way of saying this. The humbling message is that most people have little power other than in their identification with the powerful forces that use them. The bit of psychological adroitness the seeker has to manage is to place oneself under the influence of forces that are aimed towards one's ultimate benefit. The robot cannot exactly stop being a robot, but it can become a robot that takes a bold step out of the mad parade and begins to search for its Programmer, following the guidance that is provided.

The point-of-reference as a pivotal issue in inner work needs to be further addressed. Its significance is that every philosophical question or spiritual concern is relative to the reference point from where it is generated, as it is only the "self" at that point who can appreciate the answer and is upon whom validity is based.

Questions that are asked in daily life, whether in a court of law, political negotiations, the scientist's laboratory, or a marriage counseling session, about "What is the truth?" usually fail to take into account the reference point from which the question is asked and to which the issue applies. In carelessly overlooking this crucial factor, one mistakenly looks for an absolute answer within a relative realm, thereby cursing the inquiry into the impossibility of a real solution. In the realm of theology, God is said to have created the universe in six days—yet how long was a day to God? How could time be measured before there were objects and motion, or later, before the Earth and Sun were in the same spacial relationship as now?

Point-of-reference is a principle easier to illustrate than explain. For example, it is meaningless to ask: "What time is it?," without also stating where—in which time zone?; or "How far is New York?"—from where?; "How much is this worth?"—to whom? "How fast is the earth moving through space?"—in relation to what? "How much does this weigh?"—on which planet? *What time is it on the moon?* WHERE IS THE UNIVERSE LOCATED?

It is necessary to recognize the point-of-reference in assessing social paradigms. An A.M.A. journal article on health may state that the cause of a particular disease is unknown and only drugs can remedy it—but neglect to identify: unknown to whom? Its cause and cure may well be known to practitioners of Natural Hygiene, whose articles would not be accepted in the journal. Likewise, a mainstream psychology textbook may omnisciently state that teenage sexuality is "accepted as normal"—but leave out: accepted by whom? A text on yogic psychology would certainly not accept this standard.

There is also a philosophical point-of-reference in relation to defining one's motives and objectives: "What do you want? What is your goal? What 'God' do you seek and serve?" The desire for Truth is not equivalent to the desire for peace, joy, power, love, success, knowledge, or salvation. Different objectives will require different methodologies and criteria for searching. It is important to have as clear an understanding as possible of the underlying desire generating the reasons for one's actions. Without knowing this reference point, one may end up following one tangent after another and satisfying one desire after another, but without answering the real yearning behind it all. For example, one may pursue the tracks of U.F.O.'s for decades in hopes of finally obtaining some message of inspiration from a source of benign, otherworldly consciousness, without realizing that what one is actually looking for is a connection with one's own higher Intuition and assurance therefrom that a path to non-mundane Reality exists.

This work on refining one's point-of-reference is not merely a philosophical exercise or discipline in preparation for something else. It leads one directly to a greater experience of true being. For example, a traditional question used in courses on epistemology is: "Does a falling tree in a forest make any sound if there is no one around to hear it?" This is meant to be a trick question to trip up the student, with the intended "moral" that without a listener as the point-of-reference on this experience, to complete the circuit, as it were, with the sound waves generated, there can not be said to be any real sound occurring. The point this bit of scholastic cleverness overlooks—and which leads straight into the realm of esotericism—is that while there might not be a person in the forest who perceives the falling tree, this does not mean there is no perceiver at all. A passing animal could hear. An insect living in the tree could hear. The other plants around it could hear. The spirit of Nature or of the Earth could hear. *The Observer could "hear."* The testimony of mystics is that there is nothing lacking an observer; the entire universe is itself *alive* and exists within a sea of living awareness. This illustrates how the very definition of self changes as one's point-of-reference changes. With a sly chuckle, Rose has threatened: "One day I'll close my eyes—and the universe will disappear!"

There is another pertinent example related to the earlier topic of "doing." The perennial philosophical/psychological debate about "free will vs. determinism" is never satisfactorily settled because the point-of-reference is, again, not specifically established, and an undefined, omnipresent God-like vantage-point on experience is pompously assumed by the questioner. Yet, the answer is entirely dependent upon whether the reference point on the issue is within or without the individual (assuming for a moment there is individuality). When viewed from the inside-out, the person may well experience his/her life-actions as being freely chosen, while, when viewed from the outside-in (or in retrospect), the person's "will" may be seen as having been the identification with the billion and one factors acting together from all angles to determine the whole reality of the situation and this "individual's" course through life.

This paradox is best illustrated in the metaphor of life's being like a card-game. A given game has specific rules, procedures, hierarchies of advantage, etc., through which one negotiates a route leading towards victory. The individuals holding their hand of cards will make the appropriate play at each turn based on the cards they have, the collective circumstances of the game at that moment, the strategy they need to employ to win in that particular sequence, and so on. If no errors in judgment are made, each player will take the action that is optimal in their respective situation. Subjectively, one's experience

is indeed that of "choosing" to make a particular move, but in fact, the "truth" of the play (so to speak) was objectively determined by the myriad of factors comprising that particular instant in the game. Thus, essentially: the game plays itself, and the players are found to be only the instruments of play, however varied and unpredictable the game seems to be from their vantage point. The fact is that the entire game was already contained in the deck of cards as soon as it was shuffled and put on the table. Are our lives qualitatively any different? What is "free will"?

The earlier mentioned principle: "Meaning is a function of being" relates to this theme in that the truth of life can only derive from the central, or anterior, self who is aware of this life, and through whom it flows. Thus, the Work is for seekers to refine their point-of-reference of identity and perspective through all lesser identifications and states-of-mind, until the true state-of-being and comprehensive vantage point on existence is attained. In other words: the answer to all questions—including "What is reality?" and "What is the meaning of life?"—is: "**I am**," so that the real question becomes: "Who am I?" The central message in Rose's teaching is that the true self is the observer, not what is observed. *From where does the observer see?* A final implication of point-of-reference, to be further discussed in a later section, is in regards to the transmutation of energy; also referred to in teachings of kundalini yoga and thaumaturgy. One's vital energy is focused and utilized wherever one's priorities and objectives are, and this depends upon one's level of being. One's energy is transmuted through the Work involved in ascending the ladder. Each rung where one's energy is devoted is one's current point-of-reference.

To continue with this key element in the Albigen System, there are more personal, psychological implications to one's point-of-reference in the work towards self-definition. An example of how one's selfhood is violated and seduced early on into a false category is with the terms, "here" and "there." Someone asks us as a child: "Are you from around here?," and one is immediately forced to reduce oneself into terms of location and limitation. The answer to this question all depends upon what boundaries one is setting on what is "here" and what is "elsewhere," as well as the size of this "you." When one sets no boundaries, there is no "there"; there is only here. Everywhere is *here*. "There" is here too, when "I" is everywhere. There is no enemy; no "other" to threaten us. Yet, we are not encouraged to think this way, lest one be considered uncompetitive and fit only for an institution. So, one learns to construct rigid ego-parameters in both identity and mentation, which only become more hopelessly calcified with age, until death mercifully ends the farce.

The matter of point-of-reference also comes up in regards to the common claim by hypnotists that subjects could not be made to do something while hypnotized that they would not normally do. There are several fallacies implied throughout this statement:

- A. We are always in one form of hypnosis or another our entire lives. Those rare few beings who are not are called "Enlightened." Our minds are not "normally" free and clear, except when we voluntarily submit to hypnosis. Actually, it takes tremendous spiritual maturity to recognize one's existent state of hypnosis and to awaken from it. Strictly speaking, all identification with the mind and the contents of consciousness can be considered a form of hypnosis.

- There is no single "person" who chooses one distinct value system. We are a conglomerate of many "I's", often with conflicting values. Even a dynamic, focused person may well be nothing more than the product of intense conditioning (e.g., a patriotic soldier). People who are drunk might do things they would not do when sober. Those possessed by sexual passion likewise. Is this much different from hypnosis?
- If a person does not act on a hypnotic suggestion, it is not because one's virtuous character resisted it, but because there was another hypnotic suggestion already in place (referred to as "my will") that superseded the impetus of the new one. The course the psychological experience of hypnosis takes is dependent upon the "self's" range of identifications with various egos, programmings, and states-of-mind and which level or category of priority (point-of-reference) is being tapped at that moment.

A related theme appears in the therapeutic work of dream interpretation; the principle that all the characters and events in a dream are "you." The error, once again, is that this "you" is not precisely defined, and is not necessarily one, whole person. A war veteran who had been severely wounded in combat and who later has recurrent nightmares about fighting on the battlefield is not necessarily projecting himself into every enemy soldier who is firing on him, due to his own repressed hostility, anti-social feelings, intra-psychic conflicts, unresolved Oedipal issues, etc. He is dreaming this because he lived it and cannot forget the living nightmare of it. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar (unless one wishes to metaphysically speculate upon having created one's entire life-experience as a collective manifestation of the soul's destiny). It would be more accurate to state that everything in a dream is related to the "you" who is observing/experiencing the entire story—including the little "you" in the dream. This definition of the self is much bigger, or of a higher dimension, than the finite character in the story being witnessed. What would still remain is the necessity to fully define this observing self as an existential experience.

The experience of dreaming provides another good example of the meaning of point-of-reference—and is possibly a sly hint provided us by a benevolent deity about the real nature of experience and a clue about the direction towards reality. One can be aware of the shift in consciousness from the dream-state to the waking-state, and thus aware of the shift in one's point-of-reference. First, one is immersed in the dream that is being experienced, and then an instant later, one finds oneself in a different state of consciousness, with only dim memories of the "reality" of moments before. One is now in a new reality; ostensibly the real one. It is most valuable *to get a glimpse of the observation of the shift in paradigms between the two states of identification*. One should not fail to take the hint and should begin doubting one's current paradigm of waking consciousness and experience of "me-ness" as being the final reality. Keeping in mind the Law of Progression, a further awakening may be possible.

The acknowledgement of this principle gives the Albigen System an important pedagogical advantage over many "New Age" philosophies and simplistic misinterpretations of Advaita Vedanta and Zen. Some people study teachings of esotericism and encounter the inspiring message: "You are already Enlightened; you just don't know it!" Such a reassuring conviction then alleviates any need to prove it. This is functionally meaningless, dishonest, and even dangerous. This is like saying we are all really millionaires but we just don't have the money or can't remember where we buried it; or dreaming, but thinking in the dream: "I am really awake," while still wholly identified with the dream.

After all these previous examples of illustration, this is really where the principle of point-of-reference relates to the work of self-definition. The final truth may well be, as the sages claim, that the real Self is God, or the Absolute. However, if this is not a realization, it remains as nothing more than a concept in the mind of the fictitious dream-character one now is, to be used for comfort and as a justification for non-effort. There is no value in merely believing that one is really the Enlightened Self, if the one holding the conviction is not really this Self. There is tremendous effort involved in undoing that "you just don't know it."

It must be clearly understood: **our point-of-reference is whatever and wherever our state-of-identification as "self" exists as our experience**, whether it be the body, one's emotional condition, one's state-of-mind, a specific ego, or whatever. This may be later recognized to be mistaken and one may take a step up the ladder to a more valid estimate of self. In the meantime, we must know and be honest about where our "I" really is in the vast range of possible spaces and states, as, conversely, we are (realistically speaking) wherever our point-of-reference is, and not much more. This is, again, why Rose stresses the necessity for becoming the truth, rather than only conceptualizing it, worshiping it (the conviction that "belief in God" is good enough), or assuming one is it. This is protection from the temptation to "...pretend starting out on the path 100 miles up in the air, when you aren't really there," as he puts it. Strictly speaking, our truest point-of-reference currently can only be the awareness of our unknowing, our invalidity. He recommends that we humbly acknowledge this as our starting point.

The principle of point-of-reference also has practical applications in a therapeutic context, for oneself or in working with others. The most serious example is in the urge for suicide. A person is suffering and feels hopeless, and so wants to die. The problem in this is that the person has a mistaken understanding of "who" it is who needs to die, in order to end the suffering. As the self is usually fully equated with the body, the person kills the body. This is an overreaction that may not permanently solve the problem, but can seriously hamper further efforts to work on it. Suicide may only be procrastination in dealing with the real issue and one may later regret the act ("one" meaning: the mental pseudo-entity that believes in itself). When the anatomy of the concept of "self" is analyzed, one may discover that the mistake was in the maintenance of some ego, vantage point, or attitude that was erroneous and caused the subjective experience of suffering, apart from whatever objective hardships were occurring as events. Actually, the impulse towards suicide may be regarded as a crude, though vaguely accurate, intuition about what needs to be done as philosophical work. The esoteric path is a form of deliberate "suicide"—although what dies is not really oneself (and certainly not the body) but rather the identification with a false definition of self and all the psychic projections that go along with it.

There are various other examples that come up. A person who loses a body part in an accident or from surgery may be inclined to suffer from the belief that one's self has correspondingly diminished. Cases of multiple personality disorder are a classic form of confused self-definition, in which one's identity shifts among different points-of-reference, with no objective self overseeing them all. People crippled by addictive personalities attempt to escape their emptiness and pain and to lose themselves by merging their identities with the objects of their hoped for salvation: drugs, alcohol, food, sex, "love", causes, etc.

People who are victims of rape or some other form of abuse sometimes identify with the injustice and degradation done to them and feel somehow responsible for it, rather than regarding themselves as

victims. They may feel shame and guilt in their belief of having done something wrong or were deserving to have attracted the harm. Logotherapy works with such cases of unavoidable suffering and helps people to "reframe" their experience by enduring it with a detached dignity, rather than resenting it or feeling disgraced by it. The sense of self is not enmeshed in the experience, but regarded as separate from it; undefiled. People learn to not identify with or interject others' projected sins—and eventually neither with their own.

Paradoxically, others may consider themselves too entirely separate from their experiences in the form of a crystallized ego, and when harm comes in any form they resist it, resulting in the "psychic whiplash" of neurosis or psychosis. In this sense, the proper adjustment in understanding would be to accept the reality of the violation to the self as a whole experience or life-gestalt and follow through with the momentum of it to resolution in organic equilibrium. One's point-of-reference thus becomes the totality of the stream of experience and not only the rigid ego who has been victimized/traumatized by it.

A complementary pattern occurs with the criminals who commit the wrong. Oftentimes, there is the pattern of feeling some shame and guilt for what they are doing, while at the same time denying their crime to themselves and others, as a defensive measure by the ego. This too could be reframed to where they come to see that they are not so much predators as they too are victims—of their own insanity, stupidity, bestiality, or rage. If this difference in perspective is understood, the resistance to acknowledging their condition will end, self-forgiveness occurs, and a humble returning to truth can begin. The first step of the A.A. Twelve Step program (admitting being helpless with one's problem and surrendering to the authority of a higher power) is one good example of this shift in point-of-reference.

There is a common denominator of relevance to therapy to all these and other examples of erroneous points-of-reference and self-definition; something that will be explained more thoroughly in the sections on meditation and Jacob's Ladder. The message is that **it is always the truth-oriented part of the self that is obscured or deluded by the false self**. Whether the person identifies with a state of sickness or victimization, the real self is kept hidden behind the pathology. We generally do not sufficiently doubt the validity of our own identities and perceptions, and thus the outgrowths from their contamination: our feelings, desires, attitudes, beliefs, etc.; in short: our paradigm of life. Rose wants us to realize: "It is apparent that at times the inner self, or anterior observer is incapable of infallible apprehension...and even more it is capable of distorted creations" ([Rose, 1979c, p. 11](#)).

For example, a person may be manifesting some form of sexual perversion and justifying it as "my desire" or "my preference." By thus identifying with and accepting a state of pathology, the person does not fight it, but regards the state of delusion as "who I am and entitled to be," either claiming helplessness or a divine right in having been created this way by God. The clinician of misguided compassion may then unwittingly "enable" the client by reinforcing this external, parasitical, imposter-ego that feeds off the real inner self and its host body, rather than confronting its falseness and defying it. One must doubt one's "own" experience enough to be able to discern such mental/egoistic contamination of what is true. One must also be wary of the false self-observation that occurs within a state of delusion, which then justifies the state, instead of exposes it in the light of objective awareness from outside the state. In brief: the person has to learn to identify with the truest part of oneself and view



all aberrations that are negative to this anterior self (whether subtle or gross) as a form of violation, not an experience of "free choice"—with no price.

The result of such inner work is a paradigm shift, and the objective of such meditation is to see existence as it is, without any paradigm or ego-filter projected onto it, even a "spiritual" one.

There is one final bit of relevance to this topic. It concerns the method or strategy of presenting an esoteric teaching that aims at Enlightenment. One's not understanding the principle of point-of-reference results in the seeming conflicts between different teachings that may otherwise be complementary. It is very important to be clear about WHO the teaching is addressing and the WAY or direction of the inquiry being advised.

In Rose's teaching (as in Gurdjieff's and most other forms of progressive mental/spiritual development), the listener or receiver of the teaching is considered to be the human being as the seeker of something transcending the personal, which is only later discovered to really be oneself. Advaita Vedanta, which could arguably be considered the highest teaching or most direct path, speaks its message to the listener as being the True Self who is hidden behind the confused "person" who is looking for the True Self. Rather than devising a methodology for this seeker to arrive at the recognition of his own falseness and thereby Self-Realization, Advaita attempts to make contact directly with the part of this person that is true: that single ray of *being* emanating from the Self that passes through this person's awareness. The seeker's psychology, life, and efforts along spiritual lines are all considered to be fictional. The emphasis is upon reminding the Self of its identity as pure awareness only, isolating it, and backing it away from its delusive identification with this person-as-seeker. Rose's teaching ultimately brings the seeker to this same realization, but considers the understanding taught in Advaita to be towards the end of the path or the top of the ladder; the seeker requiring more accessible guidance (or necessary fiction) in the earlier stages of work.

A related distinction is that the Albigen System (as well as Zen) recognizes the student's point-of-reference to be in a state of duality, and hence one's efforts to transcend this plane requires acknowledging and mastering the paradox through the experience and use of tension. This involves the concentration upon one's koan, resulting in triangulation, transmutation, and comprehension; in a word: becoming. Advaita intends a non-dualistic path (or non-path, for a path is by definition dualistic, as it presupposes an individual doing something to get somewhere else, whereas the final Realization is said to be one of absolute unity—no seeker, no path, and nowhere to go), in which the constant point-of-reference is the awareness of (or from) wholeness.

It is crucial to understand this dichotomy of "ways" in assessing the interrelationship between all forms of spiritual search. A suggested perspective for their reconciliation will be presented in a later section.

To sum up much of the foregoing material, it could be simply stated that the essence of the Albigen System is the maintenance and continual refinement of one's point-of-reference of self-definition—which is the "becoming"—until the Realization of Truth is attained. What thus occurs is that one's point-of-reference of identity shifts from the experience of one's body in the world and one's psychological reaction to this experience, to that of the observer of this entire scene. What gradually happens, then, is that neither one's skin nor psyche is considered the boundary line between inside and outside, as it is to

us now: what is inside of one's skin (all physiological processes) as well inside one's psyche (all subjective, mental experience) is not "inside" anymore, but now also "outside"—of the observing self.

Beyond a point, the meanings of inside and outside blur together. The astronomer looking outward to discover the origin of the universe and the mystic looking inward for the same purpose end up seeming very much the same.

Just as our point-of-reference in a movie theater is usually the story being enacted in the film and not the awareness of the person in the audience who is watching it, applying the principle, "As above, so below," Rose refers to the obvious larger metaphor of life itself being a picture-show projected onto a screen, and that we have learned, from the moment of birth, to identify with the image on the screen rather than realizing that we are the One watching. He confronts each person with the central issue the Albigen System is meant to answer: **"Beneath the numerous faces of personality and pretense, who is the final observer that watches and plays your role in life?"** (Rose, lecture poster).

Our remaining transfixed by the performance is not only due to ignorance and habit. We have also learned to love the fiction we create—while not suspecting that we too are created. We have grown an ego of pride and self-satisfaction in our role, reaffirmed through projection from others' eyes, to whatever extent we are successful in the usual pursuits in life. Yet, this conditioned enjoyment is also confronted for the emptiness it really is: "You must become an observer, instead of remaining an actor, before an audience of fools" (Rose, lecture poster).

Once we are sufficiently disillusioned by the insubstantiality of life as we know it, the untrustworthiness of our religious imaginings, and the flimsiness of our evident selfhood, the attention begins to turn inward and we wonder about our origin, suspecting that the solution to all our problems lies in discovering our forgotten source. This beginning phase is quite simple, yet one must be careful not to cheat against oneself in this direction too by escaping into concepts:

When we ask ourselves: "Who am I?," we are taking an initial step. We do not begin by saying: "I am this or that." We may concede that we cannot identify ourselves properly, and feel that we are basically an awareness, with a body and mind somehow functioning and in contact with that awareness. We are aware of our mind, in other words, as well as being aware of the body. ([Rose, 1979c, p. 64](#)).

Rose is saying we should not immediately rush to answer our own question, based upon what seems to be or what we figure should be the case. We must openly consider the question and all that it implies. We are aware of a person who is wondering who this person ultimately is.

Different general categories of self-definition are provided by psychology textbooks, based upon the different levels of experience and reference points in daily life. The self is commonly equated with any or all of the following: one's body and its sensual experience, one's sexual functioning, one's social roles, one's personality makeup, one's thoughts and values, and the emotional nature of the child. Working with the principle of the process of elimination in gradually zeroing in on what we are, we first determine what we are not. We know we are not exclusively any of these psychic components because we can see them and we cannot be what we see, as they are apart from the one who is seeing. We are aware of these aspects of experience, yet would be mistaken to automatically assume we are them. We must excavate ourselves from the projection, as depicted on the cover of Psychology of the Observer.

There is a paradox here, as there inevitably is in everything we stop to examine. We must not go to the other extreme and reject all of these elements out-of-hand as not being us and claim that we are strictly some spiritual essence untouched by any mundane considerations. This is another common trap into which naive (or potentially corrupt) metaphysicians can fall: that all of life is "just an experience" and it makes no difference what someone does, as it is all for education and/or entertainment, with no penalties for mistakes and so one should sample everything at least once. This attitude could result in the reckless abandonment of one's health, sexual restraints, social responsibilities, psychological integrity, etc., with the rationalization that the spirit is forever free, life is for unlimited experience, and everything is perfect in its own way.

Rose is quite strict in insisting on the principle of one's becoming the truth, and doing this by becoming truthful in all ways; not by dismissing all human experience, even the most debilitating, as irrelevant to a postulated spiritual essence one has not verified. Although, according to one way of looking at it, this latter point may ultimately be true, Rose states that the proper ordering of experience in the relative dimension is essential in order for one to ever realize spirit, otherwise one may become "stuck" in some pathological dead-end within the illusion and never be able to get out.

To start with, however, he wants to counter the strongest programming we have working on us; the one from which all other delusions derive: our identification with the body and the workings of somatic consciousness. Rose offers a realistic explanation of how to assess ourselves, based on his own experience:

It will do us no good to deny the body as being part of us, but it is good to deny that it is all of us. Only when we have learned to become aware when the body is unconscious, will we be able to look upon the body-type of consciousness as being inferior and illusory. ([Rose, 1979c, p. 63](#)).

This is another reason why he counters materialistic psychologies and claims the proper direction to take in pursuing self-definition is back towards the source of awareness, rather than our habitual tendency to go outward into cataloging the endless permutations of relative variables, or indulging in the delight of their continually changing configurations. The "television set" of life is always on and there is an endless variety of shows from which to choose. Only the viewer is constant—and real.

This is not to be accepted merely as an inspiring theory. The practice of self-study reveals to one's inner vision that our previous sense of solid selfhood is not as consistent or unified as we have always trusted it to be. Rose here refers to the two levels or aspects of self-definition, human and transpersonal, that could be regarded as two ends of a ray: "Man is not an individual as much as he is a changing mass. He is, on the other hand, an unchanging unit of life, or absolute light, that the changing, relative man is unaware of" ([Rose, 1979c, p. 35](#)). The work is thus dual in nature: to thoroughly know the structure and nature of human experience, while also deepening and clarifying the quality of awareness of experience.

Rose generally avoids any metaphysical, cosmological discourse, as such comments can be nothing more than conceptual speculation to the listener who has not yet realized the truth to which he can only allude, and as such, can only become one more distraction or trap. However, he does occasionally risk describing what awaits the seeker at the end of the road, for the sake of encouragement and quickening the intuition:

I am quite convinced that each person is a finger of the sun. The celestial sun; an Absolute Reality. The Atman and the Brahman—each person. That's the reason you find God by looking inside. Really finding yourself is finding where that Being touches you. And then when you find it—you find that it IS you. I'm not saying that it is a part of you; I say that it IS you. ([Rose, 1985, p. 234](#)).

This provides a more complete understanding of what self-definition involves. First, we must accurately identify the Atman in its earthly manifestation—meaning one's human self. Simultaneously, we must trace the individual "I" passing through the human mind back to its source in the ocean of awareness. This leads to Essence Realization, or Brahman.

This brings into question one of our most cherished notions; one fought for and asserted most emphatically in western culture: individuality. What exactly is individuality? What are its ("my") boundaries? What exactly is the dividing line between inside and outside; between me and not-me? If a 300-pound person diets and loses 150 pounds, is this individual now only half a person? Who is this "I" and how is it measured? Our definition of individuality changes the better we come to know ourselves. The line dividing the person from the environment begins to blur. The line dividing the inner self from the person becomes more distinct. Whether or not there is a real "I" at the core of our experience or there is only the final, impersonal "I" witnessing all experience is unknown to us at the outset of the search. We have to begin by knowing the human being, the seeker, and be open to whatever surprising conclusion this investigation might later have.

At a certain point in the inquiry, when the insight is deep enough, one's self-definition is found to be the awareness of the experience of one's subjectivity. One is no longer strictly the actor. Individuality no longer means being a unique, willful, distinctive, and self-satisfied person. It now becomes an imprecise "I-ness," of unknown origin, that has little or nothing to do with the vain antics of the person this nameless "I" is now witnessing. In fact, taking this line of inquiry to its conclusion, Rose offers a sneak preview of the definition of the real Self: *the final observer that is aware of all other "selves"* ([Rose, 1978, p. 175](#)).

This is still only a concept for us at this point. For now, the person is in the awkward position of having to engage in the search for self-knowledge without having a distinct self as the point-of-reference from which to mastermind the searching.

There is some aid available to us, however, that makes this shift in attention and priorities easier. This brings up one of the more unique aspects of Rose's teaching. He explains that every animal, including the human animal, has implanted in it by Nature two forms of programming: **curiosity** and **desire**. These are intended as goads to keep the organism functioning, to counter the natural tendency towards laziness and stagnation, and to motivate the creature to hunt for food and a mating partner outside its immediate gene pool, as well as keep it oriented towards the attraction of manifest life.

Rose says we have a choice in this matter. He does not recommend that we negate this programming, as do those teachings that advocate a more strictly monastic, world-renouncing, or even self-mortifying response to life. He suggests it is more shrewd to use these goads, as long as they are in us, for our own purposes. Instead of our going along for the ride in the usual directions where curiosity and desire would take us—the indulgence in organic life in all its diversity, Rose says we can use the momentum of these forces for spiritual inquiry instead.

He strongly recommends that seekers redirect their attention from the dazzling delights and entrapments of the outer world instead towards the questions of inner relevance cited throughout this paper. We should turn our curiosity and desire back on themselves and let our wanting to know who is really living be the new, deliberately chosen, obsession. As John Davis, a man who had experienced Cosmic Consciousness, once advised a student of Rose's: "Follow your fascinations," meaning: first zero in on your truest yearning among all others and then trust that its self-revealing intuitive investigations will lead you wherever you need to go to find your heart's desire.

This also goes under the heading of "using mechanicalness to defeat mechanicalness"; another standard principle of the Albigen System. We use the forces that would use us. One becomes curious about the workings of one's own mind, the real meaning of life, the nature of unexplained phenomena, the resolution of the many koans and paradoxes that comprise the philosophical path, and the reality of this "God" we keep hearing so much about. One turns away from the programmed desire for pleasure, affirmation, acquisition, security, power, etc., and gradually admits that there is only one true desire demanding to be fulfilled: the yearning to find one's essence and the greater Reality in which it is rooted. The impulse of common selfishness is redefined into one's identifying with Truth, so that serving it is to one's ultimate benefit. The programming towards common gregariousness is manifested instead as the appreciation of co-workers on the path. The natural ego of achievement is redirected from earthly to spiritual aims. The organic fear of death is used as added motive for continuing the search for what does not die.

After studying oneself for quite awhile and living out the commitment to the search, one finds oneself backing further and further away from the known, which is now recognized to be insubstantial, and backing into the unknown: some beingness of validity and comprehension the seeker does not yet realize. The profound insecurity of this position is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the—usually unconscious—resistance most people feel towards any kind of serious introspection. Rose, however, offers an apt, poetic description of who this seeker really is; a description that provides some slight comfort to those who are able to bear the responsibility this status requires. He says at this point, the seeker's self-understanding reveals that one has finally become only *a question asking a question*. One must learn the difficult trick of boldly acting without a worldly ego of self-importance, nor an inner, fictional "me" to support the psychic infra-structure. After some measure of duality has been transcended and the commitment internalized, one becomes the koan, the path, the knock on the door. One becomes the unknowing.

This is leading us now to one of the most important principles in the Albigen System; one that distinguishes the method of search Rose advocates from most other religious or even esoteric teachings. He calls it: **retroversing our projected ray**.

He explains how he came to realize that this was the necessary procedure to follow for attaining Self-Realization: "I started to analyze thought. I figured if I can find out what the essence of thought is, perhaps I'll know what the mind is. And if I know what the mind is—I may know what my essence is" ([Rose, 1985, p. 62](#)). In this one statement, he is largely summing up the rationale behind his entire system of meditation.

Why should this emphasis upon knowing the nature and workings of the mind be so important? Why does Rose regard such work as a short-cut to finding the Truth, compared to the paths of the fakir, the monk, and the yogi (the first three "ways" referred to by Gurdjieff)? He describes the reason for this manner of work with a simple image: "The mind is the edge of the body; the umbilical cord. If you wish to know your source, retrace the umbilical cord." Then, he adds: "The only way you are going to realize God is through the mind itself; as Jung said: 'back through the center'" ([Rose, 1985, p. 50-51](#)). The stereotypical image of the yogi meditating on his navel is thus a serious metaphor for the real meaning and direction of meditation.

There are several aspects to this reversing or inverting of the mind's attention, which will be presented in detail in the sections on meditation, the psychology of observation, and Jacob's Ladder. The primary reason to mention at this point is again a simple one: "Return [to your Source] on the same road that got you where you are now." In this statement, Rose is describing the primordial problem as being that the original Self somehow got itself seduced and then lost in its own projected creation. What is now necessary is for this point-of-reference to pull back from its identification with the objects on the picture-screen and return to its state of ultimate subjectivity (which is thus also objectivity) along that same ray of awareness on which it was erroneously projected in the first place. We have each inherited our personal form of this collective curse and must individually do whatever work is necessary in our own confused psychology to return back on that "same road" to our original sanity, until discovering there is no longer the illusion of individuality.

Another obvious implication of this in regards to introspection is that the practice of meditation should not consist of one's becoming further identified with some created state-of-mind or belief-concept of a religious nature, however sincere the motive or accurate the object of faith might be, but to focus instead on one's personal experience of consciousness and learn to progressively discern the false from the true within it, and simultaneously the view from the viewer of it. This also has a practical relevance in therapeutic introspection. We learn to recognize all the ways in which our original pristine consciousness was incrementally deceived and perverted by the forces of ignorance in life and, by seeing the truth, to affirm our real selves by becoming the truth in all ways: vision, mentation, and action.

Rose provides a useful analogy by which the course of the inner path can be better understood: "The human mind is the only tunnel or channel through which you're going to find your Self...and the mind goes as well" (Rose, lecture, 1986). Here, he is modifying the more traditional symbol of Brahman being the celestial sun and each manifesting Atman being a ray of light projecting outward from it onto the relative world; the end of each ray having a human face. He is adding that this ray can be likened to a channel passing through the mind dimension, and this channel is clogged—with ignorance and ego. This obstruction is what prevents human beings from realizing their true nature, and in most life histories even muffles the intuition that would alert one to the falseness of mundane existence and guide one's way home. He is also forewarning us of the eventuality that the human being, in all its determined mental experience and very sense of personal "me-ness," will be left behind as we are about to enter the Self (and there perhaps realize we never really left), after it has finished its job.

Much of the Albigen System of meditation can be described simply as being the work of clearing out this channel of mental delusions and identifications with the contents of different forms of perception (see



[Chapter 14](#)), enabling this aware ray of vision to return to itself. Different spiritual teachings recommend respectively different ways of doing this. Rose does not claim to have the only method that works, but does believe the process he describes is the shortest route possible and is meant to appeal to those whose natures favor a psychological approach of inquiry into the basic philosophical issues.

It should be explained that these comments are referring to a broader definition of psychology than is its usual meaning as psychotherapy and social adjustment. The way Rose teaches it, the real meaning of "psychology" as a science and a methodology is not to be discretely divided into personal and transpersonal categories, as it generally is. The study of the personal ego-mind is incomplete if it does not also look into the origin of the one who is perceiving life through that mind and refine the philosophical convictions that largely determine that individual's experience of life. Transpersonal teachings that attempt to enable one to "find God" directly or "affirm" one's claim to divinity, without first knowing the human being thoroughly and bringing it fully into alignment with objective truthfulness, are likewise incomplete and lacking a foundation. Psychology means one thing: to know oneself. All of this self. As such, it is really one, holistic field of inquiry.

**The Albigen System is a process of using the mind to transcend the mind, through the cultivation of awareness in the work of comprehending consciousness in duality.** Rose explains the strategy for such meditation and gives a slight experiential sense of what this transition in perspective is like: "When you look at your thoughts, you're on what I consider a 'ray' of sorts, that goes back to your awareness. And when you're one with your awareness, then you're pretty much in tune with your soul; the soul of man" (Rose, lecture, 1981). This statement also explains the reason for the subtitle of this paper ("The path to reality through the self"): (a) accurate self-knowledge must be achieved before Self-Realization can occur, and (b) the ray of awareness (the real "I"/spiritual "eye") passes through the human mind ("me") and can be retroversed back to its ultimate source; the real Self thus not entirely removed from the human being, but touching one in the form of individualized awareness of consciousness. This last term can be considered a meaningful operational definition of "soul." The exact "location" where this Spirit touches the human mind will be described in a later section.

Rose refers to a difficult aspect of this work; one that is more of an internal conflict than a paradox: "This whole process becomes, then, the method of using the mind—that's the only vehicle we have—to find that which we really are, in spite of the mind itself" (Rose, lecture, 1981). The human mind is both a tool and vehicle for overcoming an obstacle—as well as being the obstacle itself. This is thus also the difficulty in devising or implementing any kind of introspective system: how to not be forever bound up in some dualistic mental loop that can only perpetuate the ego-mind in some form, while still needing to use the ego-mind in some manner to transcend itself. This is why Rose considers the way of Zen to be the most effective "methodology" possible for arriving at a non-relative state. As he explained in a previous quote, the paradox is resolved at the culmination of the inquiry when the mind too is ended or relinquished, along with all other egos and willful processes, and only the Owner of that mind remains to know itself. In the process of Zen's "letting go," the shift in one's point-of-reference again becomes evident as one encounters the question: "Who are you? Are you the one letting go—or that to which this self has let go?"

This work at reversing one's vector is seen to include the redirecting of one's motives for life actions, as well as the mental inverting of one's attention. The experience of this reversal involves one's backing

away from both the false sense of security that keeps one buffered from the existential awareness of ignorance and from the false sense of self that is projected outward as durable personality. Both are crutches. To do this, one must have tentative faith in one's own, as yet unknown, *being* behind the scenes. What actually happens is that this vector—and the curiosity, desire, and fear motivating it—becomes the final sense of security and identity on the path. Rose describes what Jim Burns calls "being one with the inner self" as meaning that condition in which one exists and functions without egos: no more internal duality, compensations, fragmentation, or contamination of selfhood, but acting wholly in accordance with dictates of one's intuition. Perhaps this is not much different, after all, from the devotional person's surrendering to the wisdom of a higher power.

Deliberate evolution requires great fortitude and perseverance in order to counter the "gravity" that pulls one back down into the domain of Nature. Rose describes our position:

(The struggle to know oneself is so great because) the force that goes downwards is just as powerful if not more powerful than the one that goes up. You have to take care of the upward vector, which is what a man becomes; a direction of energy. The great vector in life is back toward the earth. Nearly everybody is fighting tooth and nail to go back into the earth, and at the same time trying to keep from going back into the earth. So between these two efforts, there's not much left for going up into the creative (or transcendental) realm. ([Rose, 1985, p. 229](#)).

He challenges the seeker and assaults one's pride by stating: "It takes a lot of effort for someone to transform themselves from an animal into someone who is only conscious on a spiritual level." Although it would make one feel more secure, this effort towards transformation cannot be quantified or neatly choreographed by the mundane mind. He explains the only possible manner of approach: "We are aiming in a direction of non-rational conviction, guided by intuition."

- Employ curiosity and desire to search for our definition. This puts us on the Reversal Path, which is the surest path.
- Develop the intuition.
- A conscious effort to retroverse our projected ray.

Although there are many specifics yet to discuss regarding the Albigen System of meditation, all of the foregoing material should give the reader a good, general sense of Rose's direction and intention on the path recommended. He sums up the central theme in his teaching like this: "What I am really attempting to point out is a purification of the definition of the Ultimate Observer, as the real observer unfolds and is aware of itself" ([Rose, 1979c, p. 58](#)). All efforts and strategies aim towards this end.

He adds elsewhere that this purification of the watcher of the self is not an endless regression of watchers watching watchers, ad infinitum, like the mirrors facing each other in a barbershop (unless one were to regard the mirrors as mental processes of self-assessment in perpetual duality—and the whole scene being watched by the Final Observer, which eventually realizes itself). Rose does attest that this involuted obsession of self-observation does eventually come to a climactic end: the last ego-self of philosophical comprehension within the relative mind finally cracks, leaving only the real Self that was always waiting behind them all. The finite mind has become infinite.