

Is Psychological Change Necessary?

by Art Ticknor

It most definitely was in my case. I was 33 when I met Richard Rose and had my first exposure to the possibility of finding a total answer to the questions of life and death. I was married, had a family I adored, a good job, house, cars -- but I knew something was missing in terms of life-purpose and meaning. For over a decade I'd been scanning the horizon for the solution, but no matter what I considered, I could see it wouldn't provide lasting satisfaction. Then I heard Rose's message that all answers are within and that finding the answer to the "Who am I?" question simultaneously solves all problems.

That's when the work began. How does one go within? I wasn't naturally introspective, not contemplative by nature. If I'd been "ready," my psychological condition or state of being would have been ripe for the two-punch knockout that leads to total realization. The first punch causes us to see what we're looking out from, what we really are at the core of our being. We can even be talked into that seeing by another person or induced into it by the presence of someone who's preceded us, but it is still at the level of psychological knowing. If the teacher has only gotten this far, then the student is likely to conclude that such knowing is the final answer. This condition spawns the "just realize that you're enlightened; there's nothing to be done" adherents.

The second punch, the KO, depends upon being able to accept the implications of what we've seen. There's a progression of self-images or self-identifications that have to be seen as not-self before we get to the final self-image -- the self as observer -- that has to be transcended. This progressive elimination of the not-selves that we're identified with is the psychological change that's necessary before we're ready to accept the truth.

Gautama Buddha laid out an eightfold plan for this progression, beginning with externals and moving up to internal changes. Richard Rose outlined a metasytem, a threefold path that distills the essence of Buddha's advice to take refuge only in the buddha, the dharma and the sangha, and which Rose saw as equivalent to the way, the life and the truth of Jesus.

In order to become detached from our wrong self-identities, we can either wait passively and hope that life provides the proper traumas, or we can take a proactive approach of making our life an answer-seeking arrow. This may start with physical and lifestyle changes, which Rose referred to as "setting the house in order." During my first solitary retreat, a light bulb went on in my head and with it came the conviction that my only chance for finding mental clarity lay in a period of sexual abstinence. We generally have no idea how enslaved we are to the sex drive until we attempt to gain control over it. And any enslavement indicates an attachment that's part of a self-image.

Becoming an answer-seeking arrow makes sense to the person who intuits that the answer is beyond conceptual knowing and involves a change of being. This is something that the psyche, the mind, cannot reach. We become the answer. There's an obvious paradox here, since the testimony throughout the ages is that we become what we have always been -- which is another indication that the answer lies beyond conceptual understanding, beyond the mind.