

**Shifting Our Attention: From the Unreal to the Real and Everything In Between**  
**by Paul Constant**  
**Triangle Inquiry Group**  
**Center for Mindfulness and Non-Duality, Raleigh, NC**  
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*On October 1-2, 2016, the [Triangle Inquiry Group](#) and the [Center for Mindfulness and Non-Duality](#) in Raleigh, North Carolina, sponsored a Fall Retreat with the theme [The Nature of Identity/Beyond Self](#). Paul Constant was one of seven speakers at the retreat. He used the following notes for his presentation.*

### **Traits through it all**

Over the past couple of months, I've given some thought to some of the traits in my personality that have stayed with me over the past 30+ years of seeking:

1. Friendship on the spiritual path. Richard Rose said "There is no religion greater than human friendship." So I give great weight to helping others and being helped on the spiritual path—in many ways, more weight than a teacher. In my life, friends have been my greatest teachers. They're fantastic mirrors.
2. Honest / self-honesty. Immediately after my realization in 2007, I openly wrote about my experiences and doubts on [searchwithin.org](#). And those that know me well know how open and honest I've been about how things have unfolded since then.
3. Love of Truth and devotion to Truth. I love uncovering the mysteries within me. And I especially love the mystery of Reality, and I want to fuel that love in you today.

So with those three things in mind, I offer this story to help those who resonate with it. And in the story, you'll see how my four greatest fears were revealed because of the spiritual path....

### **Richard Rose**

A little bit of history on my time with Richard Rose:

- I had an awakening to my True Nature in 2007 at the age of 43 in the TAT Community Building on Rose's farm. I met Rose in 1985, and he departed TAT in 1995 due to the onset of Alzheimer's Disease. His spiritual system is one of resistance and tension.
- I was stunned by the simplicity of what I realized. I had been using a battering ram to crash the gate from inside the walls when all I needed to do was turn around and see that the garden was right there the whole time.
- But the simplicity of what I realized led to grave doubts and non-acceptance.
- A deep awakening to our True Nature can be experienced as nothingness, silence, void, one awareness, stillness, love, ineffable perfection, infinite vastness, eternal nowness, etc.
- For me, it was fundamental stripping away of the fear of death (acceptance of death).
- The realization answered my question: "What is the source of awareness?" It showed me the total depth of nothingness, when everything of me was stripped away.
- So Rose's teachings opened my head. But it left me with a question: "What is everythingness?" And it left me with a feeling of being half baked.

And so there I went again, down what seemed like another agony-filled path of seeking. In retrospect, it reminds me of Francis Thompson in *The Hound of Heaven*: "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me." I had abandoned my lover for yet another adventure....

## Teacher #2

- In 2012—about 5 years after my realization—I wanted to learn rapport. The definition of rapport is "harmonious relation." It's allowing yourself to open up through rapport with others; being in harmony with your small "s" self and your capital "S" self, which is your True Nature, life, what is—or whatever you wish to call it.
- I went to see a teacher at a retreat who seemed to encourage rapport through silent sitting in a group setting. We know the power of sitting silently in groups because it's been an important aspect of many religions for thousands of years.
- Eventually, I fell into a deep love with her (it was non-physical). Before meeting the teacher, I was a guy who was totally in his head—the tin man in *The Wizard of Oz*. For a guy who couldn't even utter the words "I love you," it surprisingly developed into a classic bhakti love.
- So while Rose opened my head and removed the fear of death, the second teacher opened my heart. It was a fundamental stripping away of the fear of love (acceptance of love).
- I also developed a formal meditation practice—sitting in silence with myself and being with my thoughts and feelings.
- Lastly, the other great love that blossomed even more was sitting in silence with others in spiritual settings.

After three years, I clearly saw a two-edged sword with this teacher: on the one hand, my heart opened to love, but on the other hand, I developed entirely new spiritual constructs about Enlightenment. Whether they know it or not, almost everyone in spiritual circles holds onto huge beliefs about big, Grand Maul realizations or the state of Enlightenment. So even with my realization in 2007, new constructs arose in me—phantoms that I was chasing....

## Teacher #3

- In March of this year, I attended a retreat with 300 people. The decision to go was based more on a whim, and the fact that I received a scholarship. Sitting in silence is a big part of it, and this teacher used a lot of humor. In fact, his story-telling and humor reminded me of spending time around Rose. All week long, he exposed and stripped away deep-seated beliefs in me.
- I more clearly saw how the conditioning runs so deep.
- The retreat removed a huge chunk of self-doubt—I knew the self-doubt was there over the years, but I hadn't realized the strength of its grip. (Note: self-doubt=humility)
- And so like a lover by my side who patiently waited while I went off on another adventure, when the self-doubt crumbled, I arrived back Home—exactly where I was during my realization in 2007. But this time, the whole thing equalized.
- Freedom from the small "s" self AND freedom to allow it to be there (example: fear).
- Freedom to allow small "s" self to be more expressive and more fully participate in life.
- Peaceful coexistence between what I am and what I'm not.
- Dynamic equilibrium (I'll elaborate in a little bit).
- Balance (I'll also elaborate on this later).
- More of a relaxing or settling into it....
- The teacher said, "Enjoy yourself." The spiritual path doesn't have to be morose—it can have an easiness to it, a profound simplicity. A beautiful mystery is revealed.
- It was a stripping away of the fear—or aversion—of small "s" self (acceptance of self).

So again, I tell this story—not because I'm trying to show you that I'm somehow special—but perhaps you might see some of this story in yourself and understand that some or all of it is possible for anyone. To recap, the three main fears are fear of death, fear of love, and fear of small "s" self. And now I see a fourth—the fear of life—fundamentally dropping away....

As you go along the spiritual path, you might find yourself opening to more paradoxes:

- Silence opens to sound
- Stillness opens to movement
- Consciousness opens to all objects in consciousness
- Awareness—and I'm talking about the everyday garden-variety awareness, being-ness or I-am-ness that is intrinsic in all of us—is always open to all forms, all experiences, and all thoughts and feelings. When were you ever not aware? And doesn't your awareness accept everything? (I'm not talking about the mind accepting anything.)
- Awareness is boundless, changeless, motionless, and timeless. And ordinary!
- We open to the unknown. In fact, we become the unknown. And I'm reminded of what Rose often asked us: "What do you know for sure?"
- We open to our small "s" self and our deeply hidden human flaws. The division within largely dissolves, meaning we see through the dichotomy between what we think we should be thinking/feeling/doing and what we are thinking/feeling/doing. The "inner manager" dissolves.
- And we open to even more discoveries about life and our self.

Each teacher has a role, but at some point, all the gifts are given. These days, instead of a battering ram, I find that a more relaxed approach helps us open up. We're always tinkering with our experience in futile attempts to manipulate our lives instead of simply allowing Reality to discover itself, to have direct perception without the mind's filters, to be with what is. We can directly and immediately tune into Reality's broadcast—which is always broadcasting loud and clear—and become less enamored with the mind's static and noise. This applies whether we're meditating or going about our daily activities.

So seeking exhausts itself; it wrings everything out of us, like a cartoon character flattened by one of those huge road rollers.

We can reach a firmer seeing of our True Nature in everything (which answered my question about everythingness). "Everythingness" can be construed as boundless nothingness in a moment of dissolving into One Awareness, but the other side of the same coin is that the Absolute contains everything—One Awareness and the relative.

Balance within the triangles of Jacob's Ladder (see *Psychology of the Observer* by Richard Rose):

- Our minds contain great wisdom and resourcefulness, but we can go too far into the intellectual self-inquiry direction.
- Our love is great at feeling our way to and through our Heart, but we can go too far in the lovey-dovey feeling direction.
- Our body is super intelligent and a highly sensitive instrument, but we can get too wrapped up in kundalini and body energy and literally get drunk on Shakti.

Synergism is another way of expressing this balance. As babies, we're in a state of pure awareness. But we can't hang out in nothingness. So we then develop a sense of separateness as we develop egos and a firm sense of self (not a bad thing). We can then mature and have a synergism between awareness and our unique particularized sense of self.

Our lives are a "dynamic equilibrium" in the moment, but often we're not seeing it. Richard Rose used the term "between-ness." Meaning, rather than a fixed state that we'd all like to hold onto, life is a moving balance between opposites. So as we pay less attention to the noise of the mind and gravitate more to what is happening now, we'll gain a much better appreciation of the paradoxes within spiritual endeavors and teachings:

Path of Resistance	Path of Acceptance
Doing	Being
Not this ("neti neti")	This too
My will/control/effort	Thy will/trust/surrender ("let it be")
Movement	Stillness
Going within	Dissolving into all
Thought	No thought

**Enlightenment is the simultaneous discovery and recognition of the following.**

**A marriage of the opposites:**

Form	Emptiness
Manifested	Unmanifested
What you aren't	What you are
Consciousness manifested thru us	Us manifested in consciousness
Always becoming	Always being
Finite	Infinite
Everythingness	Nothingness

**Nisargadatta: "Wisdom is knowing I am nothing, Love is knowing I am everything, and between the two my life moves."** He didn't imply that he lived in a constant state of either of these two opposites, but rather a movement between the two.

I know that I'll continue to spend my life uncovering the mysteries of Heart and Mind because of my love for it.

### **Observations/Tips**

First and foremost, these aren't hard-core practices or techniques. The best I can do is inspire you to use your spiritual compass to find your inner teacher and allow your own authenticity to blossom. So, in no particular order, the following observations and tips might help a spiritual seeker:

- **Remember your love of Truth**

It's amazingly easy to forget this. Our mind craves distraction by the superficial. Traits that seem compatible with the search for Truth include: deep self-honesty, gratitude, sincerity, selflessness, compassion, openness.

- **Watch yourself in the present moment**
  - You can watch thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise in you without engaging or tinkering. Recognize how the captivating qualities of the mind's noise: self-referential thoughts, beliefs, emotions, internal dialogue (blah-blah-blah), etc. Notice that I didn't say escape from or push away from the noise.
  - You can forcibly attempt to turn away from thought, but that leads to pushing thoughts away, to resistance. So rather than trying to stop thoughts and feelings, you can simply watch passively, which often immediately reduces the momentum of thought. This is quite different from resisting it or disassociating from it.
  - Thoughts quiet down and you become more in tune with your being-ness....
  - But this isn't resignation. It involves perseverance. Much like a sculptor, artist, photographer—or whatever passion or specialty in your life.
  
- **Discover friendship and rapport**
  - Friendship is consciousness seeking cohesiveness, one. Friends can be our greatest teachers—they're great mirrors.
  - The definition of rapport is "harmonious relation." Allow yourself to open up through rapport with others, your self, and with what is.
  
- **Trust in it**

Align with what is—allow life to unfold—let go of control, perhaps a little bit at a time. Notice the serendipity in your life—you'll start to notice it in real time.
  
- **What's getting your attention (now)?**

What is the immediacy of your experience? What is "now," present, direct, and intimate? The mind wants attention. The path might involve starving it by retreating from error, backing away from untruth. You begin to unravel and relinquish deep-seated beliefs, especially those about Enlightenment.
  
- **What's your life trajectory?**

I'm not talking about your life- or self-improvement project. What is your overall intention or vector—the larger picture of your life, your life's direction? What's important to you? What are you nurturing?
  
- **Find time to be with yourself**
  - Use silence in whatever way seems best for you. Meditation is a tool to know thyself—it directly exposes us to what is. It's highly confrontational: it's just you and your thoughts, feelings, emotions, moods, sensations, and perceptions.
  - Tenaciously watching what arises will allow you dis-identify with the mind's noise. It will eventually exhaust all possibilities.
  - You start to tune into your immediate and direct experience.
  - If you recognize your True Nature—and some of you have either tasted it or are deeply immersed in it—then continue to cultivate it. Become intimately acquainted with your being-ness.
  - Deep meditation brings us to a dynamic balance between motion and stillness. Attention remains fixed on now. This is far from a restful or blissful experience.
  - The body can serve as an anchor in meditation. It can bring us back to now instead of getting carried away by the mind's noise. Also, neuroscience is showing how the

brain rewires itself through certain forms of meditation. And finally, sitting quietly helps allow the internal "processor" to work off line—the brain may be attempting to resolve the dilemma of our True Nature throughout the day if we devote ourselves.

- Combined with a daily practice (walking, sitting), you can include reminders throughout the day to pause for just a minute and watch. It stops the mind and creates a silent space between thoughts, if only for a few seconds.
- Last but certainly not least, find **humor** in life and in your self! Become fooly aware. :-)