

# The Quotable Rose: Ten One-Liners That Speak Volumes

by Bart Marshall

[A talk given at the April 2009 TAT conference]

Whenever I talk about spiritual matters, sooner or later I hear myself quoting Richard Rose or recommending something I learned from him. When it came to the business of finding Truth, there's nothing Rose hadn't thought through and found words for. He also had a knack for encapsulating key spiritual strategies into short, memorable phrases that tend to lodge in your mind.

This morning I'd like to talk about ten of those key strategies that I think together express the essence of Rose's teachings in a total of maybe fifty words, all of them aimed at one thing—lighting a path to the Absolute.

As it happens, these strategies are also useful in daily life to get most anything you want, but that's not their intention. Rose had no interest in helping people live more comfortable lives or become better robots. People who came to him looking for those sorts of things usually didn't stay long. Rose's core teachings are directed at people who at least suspect that their basic problem can never be solved on the level of the problem, and that a great leap is in order.

Rose's teachings are based on the premise that extreme spiritual effort is our best shot at enlightenment. But he also cautioned that "There's no recipe for a lighting bolt." In other words, there is no direct cause and effect relationship between your efforts and enlightenment, should it occur.

Which begs the question, "So why exert any effort?" Well, because statistics show it somehow increases your odds. Yes, it's true that there's no one here to do any seeking, and that no effort is required to be that which you already are. You are most definitely already and always that which you seek. That's the absolute Truth. But a fat lot of good it does you if you don't know it.

The hard facts are that almost every incidence of Realization has occurred to someone who actively worked and prayed for it over a period of years—sometimes a whole lot of years. The mechanism at work is a mystery, but the pattern is observable so if we're serious about this enlightenment thing, it seems like a good idea to plug into it. As Rose said, "Enlightenment is always an accident, but there's ways to become more accident prone."

So the recommendations we'll talk about this morning are by no means a recipe for a lighting bolt, but they may help you become more accident prone.

I debated how to organize this, and ended up deciding to fabricate a little suspense by going with the Letterman “Top 10” format, even though the numbers I’ve assigned are virtually meaningless.

None of these strategies is inherently more important or powerful than any other, and none is a prerequisite for anything else. In fact, if you investigate any of them deeply enough, you’ll find that each includes or implies all the others—as well as twenty other Rose sayings we could have included. There’s really only one strategy.

I’ll try not to spend too much time on my prepared remarks because I think the best stuff often comes out in the discussions afterwards, but I want to say enough to spark some questions, then we can go deeper into the parts that interest you.

Okay, enough caveats. Here we go: “Richard Rose’s Top Ten Tips for Serious Seekers.”

**Number 10: Make a decision and carry it out.**

This is one of those sleeper recommendations that seem too obvious and mundane to be a spiritual instruction, but it’s deceptively powerful. It taps into the fundamental principle that once you make a decision and commit to it, the universe conspires to help make it happen.

Making and keeping commitments is the mechanism by which you build a vector—spiritual or otherwise. And until you’ve built the habit of following through on commitments to yourself and others—until you learn how to make a decision and carry it out—you’ll continue to cave and equivocate when things get tough.

Rose’s life is full of stories of his stubborn, hard-headed insistence of following through on commitments no matter how big or small, no matter what the risk.

He once was thrown from a spooked horse in a blizzard, but held on and let himself be dragged over the farm for half an hour until the horse settled. He could have gotten free at any time, he said, but he’d made a commitment to himself and to the horse that if he took it out into such a dangerous storm, either both of them were coming back, or neither.

That kind of unequivocal, some might say insane, commitment is foreign to most of us, who would have dropped off at the first opportunity and rationalized how it was the horse’s fault for throwing me, and the storm’s not really all that dangerous, and he’ll probably find his way back to the barn. All of that may

even have been true, but to Rose it was completely beside the point. Only the principle mattered. He'd given his word. End of story.

And he made a point of telling these kinds of personal stories to inspire others to adopt the same principle. He said if this sort of thing comes hard to you, just start slow. Begin by making a commitment to walk around the block every day for a month, follow through on it, then build from there.

Why is this ability important? Because if you're serious about having a shot at enlightenment, somewhere along the way you're going to have to commit to it. And if a person who follows through on commitments makes a commitment to discover Truth at all costs, there's a good chance something will happen.

**Number 9: Get your house in order.**

Again, a deceptively basic instruction with myriad implications. Mental and physical circumstances have a direct effect on the amount of time and energy available for the search, so it's an advantage to stay healthy and maintain a clean, well-ordered life. Tend to the clutter of your circumstances and mind. Arrange your life for clear thinking. Invariably this involves a movement towards simplicity—both physical and mental.

On its most basic level, "Get your house in order" means to literally clean up the outer circumstances of your life. If your desk is piled with unpaid bills, your nights are spent in soap opera relationships, and most of your calorie intake is from beer, you'll probably have difficulty thinking straight about spiritual matters or most anything else.

Getting your house in order also includes so-called character work—identifying those aspects of your personality that aren't serving you well as a seeker and taking action in those areas. This doesn't mean getting trapped into endless self-help programs trying to become superman or uber-mench. But if you have any personality traits that tend to insulate you from a spiritual accident, they need to be addressed.

Getting your house in order also means simplifying your mental landscape. The ego-mind loves complexity and drama. By nature it seeks problems and distractions, and if left uncontrolled, it will lead you deeper and deeper into the maze of illusion. So it's good to favor intellectual simplicity. Complexity is in the opposite direction of Truth.

Also, guard against hardening of the head. The natural tendency is for the nut to get tougher with age, so you need to fight against this. Keep all the circuits open. Become as a little child. Become a house that Grace might like to visit.

**Number 8: Back away from untruth.**

This is a big one. As seekers we think we're taking dead aim on Truth, and that as we proceed on the path we become ever more spiritual and get closer to our goal. Unfortunately, that's not how it works.

There's no way we can search for Truth because we don't know what it is or where to look. We may not even recognize it if it stared us in the face—which paradoxically, is just what it does every moment of your life.

But as far as the search goes, the best we can do is recognize untruths and discard them. This is what Rose called the reverse vector. In other words, the path is subtractive. The process is to uncover ignorance within you and without you—and reject it.

In the yogic tradition they say *neti, neti*—"not this, not this." The *Tao Te Ching* says:

*For students of knowledge,  
every day something is acquired.  
For observers of Tao,  
every day something falls away.*

Often, one of the first external areas a seeker needs to investigate with this mindset is religion, because religions claim to hold the Truth, and many of us were brought up to accept that claim. Religions are also low-hanging fruit for this kind of investigation because they're riddled with blatant absurdities.

When you objectively separate the wheat from the chaff you find that the core esoteric teachings of all religions are the same—simple, universal, inclusive. They prescribe no beliefs, claim no dominion, require no special hats. This is the wheat. All the rest—the mythology, rituals, dogma, politics, social engineering (which is 99% of it)—can be safely rejected because any aspect of a religion that separates its believers from the rest of humanity is bullshit. On some level everyone knows this, but belief is a powerful thing. Belief is the penny that blots out the sun. Which brings us to...

**Number 7: Doubt everything.**

Rose often greeted people by asking, "What do you know for sure?" the way most people might say, "How's it going." But it was not an off-hand question. It was intended to throw you back on yourself, and invite you to look closer at everything you thought you knew. He was always trying to prod people into questioning their beliefs.

Why? Because the single biggest obstacle to a final Realization is thinking you already know most of what's going on. We cling to a paradigm of supposed knowledge into which we require ultimate Truth to fit, then wonder why nothing happens.

We think we already know 95% of the truth and just need answers about that last 5%. We've got the basics nailed down, now all we need is the cherry on top and we'll be enlightened. Not so. As Rose famously said, "You don't know anything until you know Everything."

As good seekers we dutifully ask "Who am I?" but all the while we hold sacrosanct certain bedrock beliefs, like "I'm a real person with my own personal awareness in an infinitely old, infinitely vast universe of solid separate objects." We're more than willing to accept an ultimate Truth that validates this belief and enhances the experience of it, but will defend to the death against anything that challenges it.

The idea of doubt most seekers have is a fraction of what is meant by it. When Rose says doubt everything he means EVERYTHING. He's talking about living with a fundamental doubt that anything is what it seems. A doubt that mistrusts the senses, the mind, and everything in it. An all-encompassing doubt that in one way or another continually asks, "What's really going on here?"

Knowledge is original sin--in the sense of the true meaning of the word sin, which is "to err, to miss the mark." Christianity implies it's knowledge of sex that kicks mankind out of paradise, but it's any and all knowledge. If any supposed knowing whatsoever is present, you're on the wrong side of the gates of Eden. You've drifted into illusion.

Stop thinking you know. Return to the child-like state of wonder, unknowing, mystery. Have only questions, never answers. If an answer comes, question it. Return to unknowing. Only an empty cup can be filled. In a state of complete unknowing, one look reveals All.

**Number 6: Keep your head on it.**

This is one of my favorites. So simple, yet so powerful. Just keep thinking about this stuff rather than something else. The beauty of this is that it can be done anywhere, anytime—no matter what your body might be engaged in. You could say this is a meta-strategy, and that the other nine are tips on the most efficient and productive methods for keeping your head on it.

Keeping spiritual matters in the forefront of your mind connects you with a universal and easily observable principle, which is that it is in the area of your greatest interest and activity that providence lends a hand. Opportunities materialize, coincidences occur, revelation happens. Einstein had no epiphanies about art. Picasso had none about math.

**Number 5: Look under every rock.**

In other words, don't confine yourself to the words of a certain teacher or tradition—cast a wide net. Be open to finding Truth anywhere and everywhere. The downside to this strategy, of course, is that there are thousands of rocks out there, especially these days. This is where discrimination comes in. Develop a good nose for bullshit and back away when you get a whiff.

I think it's also useful to keep the “back of the book” answer in mind as you turn over all these rocks. Throughout history, in every part of the world, everyone who has ever awakened to the true nature of Reality reports the same thing: The person you think yourself to be does not exist—there is no world, there are no people.

I'm not suggesting you believe this, or accept it intellectually, but if you use it as a working hypothesis, you've automatically eliminated all teachings that emphasize the enhancement of a (non-existing) self, the improvement of a (non-existing) world, or compassion for its (non-existing) people.

Right there you've saved yourself a lot of work because this covers most of what's out there. You've blown right past all the organized religions, self-help gurus, and new age cul-de-sacs. Buddha saw this as step one. “First of all,” he said, “First of all understand that the world has no substance whatever. Then let the mind fight it out with the mind.”

**Number 4: Re-traverse the ray of projection.**

Rose often talked about the world as a projection of the mind. In conjunction with this he talked about three aspects of mind: Manifested Mind, Unmanifested Mind, and Manifesting Mind.

Unmanifested Mind is the boundless emptiness that is forever behind you no matter where you turn. Experientially, it is anterior to the window we appear to look out of. You could say it's the “back of your head.” It's that close.

Manifested Mind is the view “forward” into Creation—the experience of world, of life. Unmanifested Mind is still and changeless. Manifested Mind is in constant motion.

Manifesting Mind is the “point of view” from which Creation is both projected and witnessed—the point through which no-thing becomes everything. Experientially, this is what we call “me.”

Obviously, what we experience as life is the movement outwards—the projection from Unmanifested Mind to Manifested Mind. When Rose advises to re-traverse the ray of projection, he’s saying to do a 180—re-traverse the ray from Manifested Mind to Unmanifested Mind. Look back into what you’re looking out of.

Those of you familiar with Douglas Harding will recognize this as the basis of his experiments—to reverse the ray of looking and projection from outwards to inwards.

It’s also a valuable exercise to allow the attention to rest squarely on Manifesting Mind—on the pinpoint of projection through which infinite emptiness becomes a full-color sensory extravaganza. That point of projection is the Creator—the portal between Source and Creation. And You are That.

**Number 3: Life gives you all the koans you need.**

This is one that has very practical implications, and which turns up in our group conversations with some regularity. A koan, of course, is a Japanese word for an unsolvable riddle used in some Zen practices. Zen koans are artificial problems introduced into the mind intentionally as a means to stop the head and allow Realization.

When Rose says “Life gives you all the koans you need,” he means that the normal course of your daily existence will provide endless organic problems and opportunities for self-inquiry. You don’t need to introduce artificial ones like “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

By extension, he also means that your unique spiritual path to the Absolute is to be found in the living of your daily life. Your life, not the life of a teacher you think you should emulate, or an imagined life you think better fits a serious seeker. In other words, you don’t need to go to India or enter a monastery unless it arises very organically for you. Don’t use spiritual work as an excuse to run from the hand you’ve been dealt.

Your fastest road to Truth is straight through the circumstances that naturally befall you—eyes wide, mind open, heart grateful. Don’t turn your back on a path that has been tailored specifically for you in favor of an imperfect idealization of what you think a spiritual path should be.

**Number 2: Make your whole life a prayer.**

Prayer is a loaded word that for a lot of people conjures images of forced pieties in church, a capricious, judgmental God, and obedient children on their knees at bedtime. But if we can get all that out of our head, we've got a better chance at understanding true prayer.

True prayer is to enter into an ongoing relationship with the highest power you can imagine and hold it accountable for anything and everything in your life. Thank it when you feel grateful, curse it when you feel wronged, but never doubt for an instant that you are helpless without it. Trust it, become its instrument, but let it know in no uncertain terms what you want.

The Bible says to pray without ceasing. In the book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the protagonist takes this to mean constantly repeating the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Which may be a good practice that might lead somewhere, but it's not what Rose meant. To spend your life praying is not the same as making your life a prayer.

To make your life a prayer is to hold in your heart your greatest desire, your highest intention, and be prepared to do anything and everything you are asked as the granting of it unfolds. In practice, you will be asked to do far less than you might imagine, but just enough to give you opportunities to waver. Don't. Hold up your end of the bargain and your desire will be fulfilled. Often when Rose voiced this suggestion, he added a phrase on the end of it: "Make your whole life a prayer," he said, "and it will be granted instantly."

Okay, here we go. Drum roll...

**The number 1 Richard Rose tip for serious seekers: Between-ness.**

As far as I know Rose coined the word between-ness, and if I had just one word for you today, that would be it. Between-ness. But just how do I mean that? How did Rose mean it?

Between-ness is an elusive concept not easily explained, but once you stumble onto it and feel it, you know everything about it. Simply stated, Between-ness is a way of holding your head so that a desire becomes manifest in your life experience. It's a method by which you tap into the Law of Creation and bend it to your will. A method for transcending the accepted paradigm in which we're trapped—a paradigm that doesn't allow for creation-on-demand. Rose sometimes called it "white magic." "If you hold your head between two thoughts," he said, "you can perform miracles. Thought, no-thought, creation."

Between-ness can be used to get anything a person wants in life, from the most mundane to the most exalted. As an experiment, Rose even used it when playing poker to get the cards he wanted dealt to him. But most importantly, he also taught that between-ness could and should be employed as a means to Self-realization. Used in this way, he called it ultimate between-ness.

I never really understood the concept of ultimate between-ness, and as a seeker I never consciously employed it. But I've come to the conclusion that after 37 years of beating my head against various walls what finally did the trick was that I somehow arrived at a state of ultimate between-ness, and that this state proved irresistible to Grace.

Which is not to say that in any way I caused it to happen. Realization is always an accident, a gift that has nothing to do with worthiness or effort. And yet there is not a disconnect between desire and actuality. In fact just the opposite. An intense, unconflicted desire for Truth may be the single most important aspect of the spiritual path.

At the September 2007 TAT meeting I gave a workshop on between-ness, and in preparation for that session I found myself breaking it down into four composite elements that could be talked about individually—intention, confidence, gratitude, and indifference—but it's much more than the sum of these elements, and also much simpler than it seems when we dissect and analyze it.

A true master of between-ness can manifest very quickly, and people call it a miracle. Jesus was a master of between-ness. All the *siddhis*, the powers, listed in the *Yoga Sutras* are examples of what can be accomplished by mastering between-ness. Patanjali called it “making *samyama*.”

An unconflicted desire given 100% attention in a state of between-ness will manifest immediately. Truly, you can move mountains—or, better yet, open a door to the Absolute.

That's about it for my prepared remarks. I'd like to open it up now for discussion and questions.