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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Five Years with a Zen Master

DURHAM, NC – August Turak, CEO of software company Raleigh Group International and founder of the Self Knowledge Symposium Foundation, will be giving his lecture *Five Years with a Zen Master* on November 4, 1999, at 7:30 in Von Canon. The lecture recounts Turak’s first few years spent with Zen Master Richard Rose, who launched Turak into his lifelong spiritual search.

It was in 1972, during Turak’s sophomore year at the University of Pittsburgh, that he heard through some friends about a West Virginia Zen Master named Richard Rose, who would be speaking at the Pittsburgh Theosophical Society. “I saw a short, stocky man standing on the curb outside the building, and knew it was him immediately,” says Turak. “The thing I’ll never forget is his intense blue eyes—they looked straight into mine, through the back of my head, and two thousand light years into the universe behind me.” Shortly after getting to know Rose, Turak temporarily dropped out of college and spent five years working with him on his farm in West Virginia. *Five Years with a Zen Master* focuses in particular on the first intense, difficult, and incredibly rewarding summer he spent with Rose.

“At that time in my life, there was one problem primarily on my mind: death,” says Turak. “The question I was asking myself was, ‘how does a person live a meaningful life, when no matter what you do, you still die?’” Before he met Richard Rose, Turak pursued his question in the libraries, digging through Nietzsche, Plato, Shakespeare, Alan Watts—any author who he thought might have an answer. “But,” Turak says of these authors, “I agreed with all of them but none of them agreed with each other. What was I supposed to do?”

While Rose supported the pursuit of intellectual knowledge, his main message was a call to action. As Turak recalls, “The first thing Rose said was, ‘Some people think Zen is about finding peace. There’s plenty of peace in the cemetery. I’m not here to give you peace—I’m here to wake you up.’ I walked out of that lecture with my head spinning.”

The rest of Turak’s story unfolds from that initial encounter at the Theosophical Society. Turak’s tale is sometimes humorous, sometimes intense, sometimes tender, and always riveting.

Turak has given his *Five Years with a Zen Master* for five consecutive years at Duke University, UNC, NC State, and other venues—and has sold out every time. Rob Nikander (Duke '99) saw the talk for the first time in 1997, calling it “The most intense two hours of my life.” Dr. William Willimon, best-selling author of *The Search for Meaning*, Dean of the Duke Chapel, and ranked by *Newsweek* as one of the top-ten preachers in the English-speaking world, says “Turak is a modern-day Socrates...I feel like I should be following behind him writing down the things he says.”

“I’ve never seen anyone walk out of *Five Years with a Zen Master* without a stunned expression on their face,” says Kenny Felder, founder of One Tree Software and former group program manager at Microsoft. “And I know what that look means, because I’ve been there. They’re thinking: ‘Do I have the courage to do what he did?’”

For more information on Augie Turak or the Self Knowledge Symposium Foundation, contact Rachel Medlock at 919-878-3717.

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