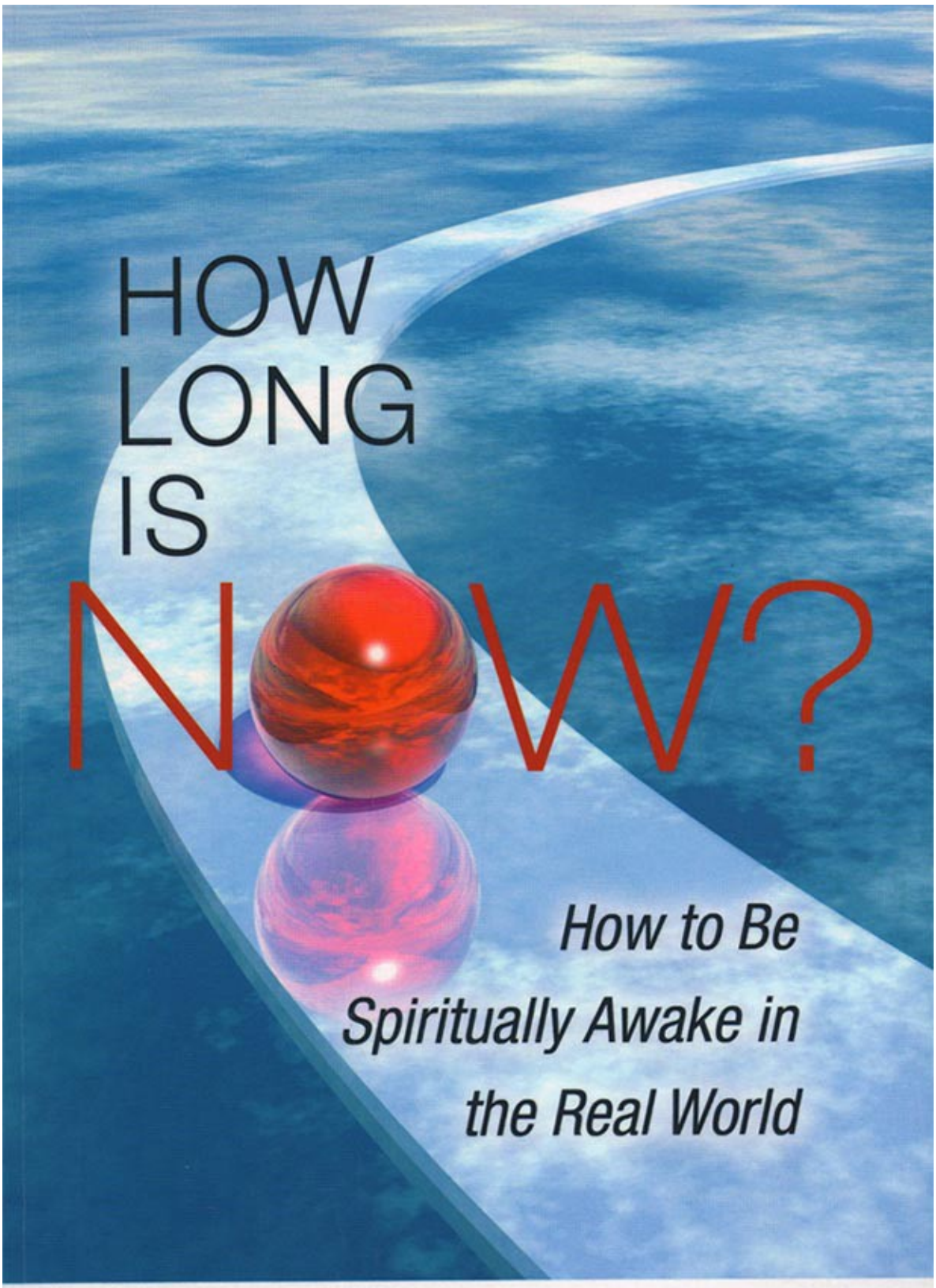

TIM FREKE

HOW LONG IS NOW?

How to Be Spiritually Awake in the Real World

TIM FREKE

T!M FREKE is a spiritual pioneer whose work has touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. He is the author of more than 30 books, which have been translated into 15 languages, including a top 6 Amazon 'Surprise Bestseller' and Daily Telegraph 'Book of the Year'.

Tim has spent his life exploring world spirituality and is able to guide others to a direct experience of the awakened state. He presents life-transforming retreats, experiential seminars and entertaining evenings of 'standup philosophy' throughout the world and online.

To watch free videos of Tim, find out about forthcoming events and subscribe to his inspirational 'WAKE UP CALL' newsletter, visit www.timfreke.com

Copyright © 2009 by Timothy Freke. All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein.

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE THE FABULOUS STORY OF ONE AND ALL
CHAPTER 1. THE STAND-UP PHILOSOPHER
CHAPTER 2. THE MYSTERY OF THE MOMENT
CHAPTER 3. THE BREATH OF LIFE
OTHER BOOKS BY TIM FREKE

PROLOGUE

THE FABULOUS STORY OF ONE AND ALL

My life has brought me to this moment. I am here and now. But where is here? Is it the spot beneath my feet . . . or the room I am sitting in . . . or the country I inhabit . . . or the whole universe? And how long is now? Is it this breath . . . or this particular day . . . or my lifetime . . . or forever?

I want to tell you about the extraordinary events of my life and what they have taught me about living in love with the ever-present, ever-changing moment. But where should I begin? 'Tim' has been enjoying this magical mystery tour we call 'life' for a little more than 49 years . . . some 2,500 weeks. But my story begins long before, because Tim's brief adventures can only be understood within the context of the grandiose story of life itself.

In this book, I want to take you on a philosophical journey of discovery into the mystery of the moment by sharing with you some personal experiences that have led me to profound ideas. But I think that it will be fun to start our time together by going back before time . . . to tell you a fabulous story about all that has led to us being here and now.

This story is an epic saga about the evolution of consciousness, the rise and fall of empires, and the inexplicable allure of game shows on daytime TV. It's a strange and poignant tale about you . . . and me . . . and everything. I'm going to give you a heavily abridged version, because to tell the whole thing would take forever. . . literally. And it won't be an easy story to tell, since it's impossible to really put into words. But what the hell—let's go for it anyway.

THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Once upon a timeless now, there existed the mysterious source of all that is. The source was an infinite nothing, pregnant with the possibility for everything . . . the possibility of quarks and galaxies, inanimate matter and sentient life, unconscious nature and conscious reflection . . . the possibility of seeing and feeling, of fearing and hoping, of thinking and loving . . . the possibility of beautiful art and terrible cruelty, of justice and genocide, of lies and wisdom . . . the possibility for you and me . . . the possibility for this moment right now.

Before the beginning, there was a primal imagination with the power to imagine

everything . . . so that's exactly what it did. Everything is a lot to imagine, so it started with some basics and worked its way up to more complex things. First up was the idea of 'time', because it takes time to imagine everything. And with 'time' came the idea of 'space', because if you want stuff you've got to have somewhere to put it all.

There was also energy and light. And tiny particles that combined to form swirling constellations of stars. And self-organizing cells that cooperated to become flora and fauna. Like any innovative process, this was a continual dialectic between creating and criticizing, bold experimenting and ruthless editing, stupendous successes and disappointing dead ends.

The process of evolution may have been hit or miss, but it was definitely heading in a particular direction. The forms became more and more complex, and as they did, they also became more and more conscious. Eventually, the primal imagination conceived of sentient beings through whom the universe could look at itself, hear itself, touch itself, as well as—by necessity—eat itself.

It was only a matter of time before some big-brained bipeds called 'human beings' became self-conscious. These clever monkeys were not only conscious of the world around them, they were also conscious that they were conscious. And they started to ask some pretty interesting questions, such as 'Who am I?' 'Why am I here?' and 'Where did everything come from?' And this brings us to the dilemma that gives dramatic tension to our story. . . .

THE ILLUSION OF SEPARATENESS

Before the beginning, the primal imagination was like a big mind slumbering in the unconscious nothingness of deep sleep. Then it started to dream the adventure of life; as it did, it became conscious through each of the forms it was imagining itself to be. As a hippo, it experienced itself to be a hippo. As a hummingbird, it experienced itself to be a hummingbird. As a human being, it experienced itself to be a human being. And this is what created the illusion of separateness.

Human beings presumed that they were no more than the separate individuals they appeared to be in the life-dream. They had no idea that, in reality, all was one, because everything was an expression of the primal awareness that was dreaming up the universe. This cosmic case of mistaken identity would just be comical if it weren't for the fact that the illusion of separateness caused such huge amounts of suffering.

You see, when a brainy monkey believed: 'I am a separate someone', this inevitably led to a preoccupation with its own self-interest. It wanted what was best for itself, its

family, and its tribe. The result was division and conflict, oppressors and oppressed, slavery and empire. The dream of life was turning into a nightmare.

RELIGION, SCIENCE, AND CONSUMERISM

And there was something else that made matters worse. People came up with stories to make sense of life, since otherwise they wouldn't have had any idea about who they were and what to do next. Without much to go on, they created some remarkably stupid stories. And as their stories were the maps by which they navigated their lives, people's crazy beliefs led to some really crazy actions.

Men and women pictured an array of supernatural beings who were running the cosmos . . . gods of thunder and rain and fertility and, of course, war. They imagined that the gods of their tribe would help them plunder their neighbours. And so that's what they did.

At some point, the idea that there really was just one God started to become fashionable. On the face of it, you'd think this was a step in the right direction; but, alas, it was not. This God was imagined as a divine ruler of the cosmos who was depressingly similar to the vicious bullies who had set themselves up as kings and emperors here on Earth.

God was seen as a lawmaker with a large book of rules that he wanted his subjects to comply with, for which they would be rewarded with his favour. But he was a ruthless tyrant who would brutally torture all those who didn't worship and obey him. And he was all in favour of his pious devotees doing his dirty work for him. So they did . . . enthusiastically.

It took a heck of a long time, but eventually thinking people realized that religion was getting them nowhere. So they began to wonder if they should stop just making up stories arbitrarily according to taste and start paying attention to their actual experience of the world.

This was a period called 'the Enlightenment', although in fact it was still pretty 'endarkened'. It saw some remarkable individuals strutting their stuff, waging a war of ideas against superstition and dogma. They did this by insisting that it was not enough to believe something just because everyone else believed it, or because you liked the idea, or because you were too lazy to come up with anything better. You needed a good reason to believe something. And the fact that you were told to believe something in an old book, or by some self-proclaimed prophet who was channelling messages from God, didn't qualify as a 'good reason'.

Once people began adopting this 'empirical' approach, things started to speed up big-time. Some really smart scientists came up with a lot of astonishing ideas about the way the universe works, and people suddenly found that they could communicate over vast distances and fly through the air in gigantic metal tubes. And the sky wasn't the limit . . . because they even took a jaunt into outer space.

This all would have been great, but there was a problem. People were still lost in the illusion of separateness, and now they banded together in competing megatribes. So innovative technologies led to bigger, badder weapons that they could fight with on a global battlefield. The life-dream was getting much better and much worse at the same time.

On top of all of the problems in the outer world, there was a psychological crisis mushrooming in the dark recesses of the human soul. Science was very good at explaining how things were, but had nothing to say about why things were. So as the scientific worldview became trendy, life started looking increasingly meaningless and bleak. The universe it pictured was so incomprehensibly huge and inconceivably old that human beings felt insignificantly small.

Lots of people coped by adopting an 'enjoy it while you can' approach to life. They distracted themselves by purchasing lots of shiny new things and reading glossy magazines about celebrity trivia. The purpose of life became to accumulate stuff, look good in jeans, and watch game shows. Thirteen billion years of evolution had finally led to *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*

But none of this compares to the problems that now started to loom large on the horizon. The consumerist boom had been fuelled by energy created from ancient sunlight, which had been photosynthesised by primordial plants, which had become transformed into oceans of oil hidden within the earth. It was as if the primal imagination had laid down in advance the resources necessary to create the modern world. This allowed the evolutionary process to really heat up, but it also started heating up the environment, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

The underlying cause of all of these escalating problems was the illusion of separateness. People believed they were separate from each other, so they waged war. They believed they were separate from nature, so they laid waste their environment. They believed they were separate from the source of all, so they felt cast adrift in an alien world.

WAKING UP TO ONENESS

Occasionally, however, throughout the game of Chutes and Ladders that is human history, certain individuals experienced something shocking that led them to see their predicament very differently. They found themselves entering an ultraconscious state that could be called being 'deep awake'. And this led them to a momentous realization:

> Life is like a dream and, although we appear to be separate individuals in the life-dream, in reality there is one awareness dreaming itself to be everyone and everything, and meeting itself in all its various forms.

Those who experienced this momentous realization found that it utterly transformed their experience of life because when they woke up to oneness, they found themselves unconditionally in love with life. And this led them to say some unintentionally provocative things, such as:

> If you become more conscious, it will be like coming around from a coma. You'll remember that you're alive. You'll discover who you really are. You'll know that all is one. And you'll fall in love with the present moment.

Unfortunately, this didn't go down too well with the vast majority of humanity. If there's one thing unconscious people hate, it's being told that they're unconscious. So those who had awakened to oneness and love were condemned as troublemakers who should be quietly ignored or, better still, put to death.

Yet these largely unremembered men and women are the great heroes of our story. They were the trailblazers for a new stage of evolution that is beginning to really take off right now. Thus far in the human adventure, the possibility of waking up to oneness has not been taken seriously by mainstream culture, but in the 21st century, this is beginning to change.

This is occurring as a natural expression of the evolutionary imperative, just like all of the other transformations that have happened before it. As time goes by, more and more individuals are recognizing that things are not what they seem and are beginning to become deep awake. And I'm telling you this story because I have a hunch that you may be one of them.

DEEP ASLEEP TO DEEP AWAKE

So our story starts with unconscious awareness in a state of deep sleep, and it climaxes

with some ultraconscious individuals who are deep awake. The dream of separateness is the primal awareness progressing from unconscious oneness to conscious oneness.

A JOURNEY TO THIS MOMENT

And that's a brief synopsis of the plot so far. It's been an awesome journey to get us to this present moment. The universe spent an incredibly long time in a gaseous state. It also got sidetracked for millions of years into the dead end of dinosaurs. But it finally got to self-conscious beings capable of waking up to oneness.

The pioneers of awakening have cleared a narrow path to this ultraconscious state, which has allowed others to make the journey more easily. Now those who are following in their footsteps are in the process of transforming this narrow esoteric path, designed for a mystical elite, into an enormous freeway open to all, so we can collectively wake up to oneness and love the dream of life.

What's going to happen next? As things stand, the story is getting to the exciting part. Everything is in the balance. Are we so lost in the illusion of separateness that we will sleepwalk into disaster? Or will we wake up and find compassionate solutions to our problems? It's hard to say. But the cool thing is that you and I get to play a role in governing where things go from here.

CHAPTER 1. THE STAND-UP PHILOSOPHER

The softly spoken, young, black, South African talk-show host is reading his teleprompter, and is about to mispronounce the word 'philosopher'. With an endearingly deferential demeanour, he looks into the camera and introduces me enthusiastically to his audience throughout the African continent:

> Today I am privileged to have with me Timothy Freke . . . a best-selling author and world-famous falafel.

I smile to myself as I think about my adventures as a 'famous falafel', which have taken me all over the world, sharing some extraordinary ideas with all kinds of people.

I am doing this television interview to promote my 'stand-up philosophy' tour of South Africa, during which I've performed for kids at a township school, an elite gathering of business CEOs in a high-tech conference suite, intellectuals and passersby in a coffeehouse in a Johannesburg mall, and earnest spiritual seekers at a New Age festival. And wherever I go, my message is essentially the same:

> It is possible to experience an ultraconscious state, which I call being 'deep awake', in which we see that, although we seem to be separate individuals, in reality we are one. And this realization is accompanied by an awesome experience I call 'big love', because when we know that we are one with all, we find ourselves in love with all.

Becoming deep awake leads to a new way of life that I call 'lucid living'. When we live lucidly, our everyday experience of life is transformed in surprising ways, unimaginable in the familiar waking state. The numbness we call 'normality' dissipates like fog, and we become overwhelmed with wonder at the breathtaking magnificence of the universe. Our ordinary lives are transformed into an exhilarating love affair with the mystery of the moment.

This can all sound pretty outlandish, but I don't ask people to just believe what I say. As a philosopher, I am a devotee of doubt. Everyone has a built-in 'bullshit detector', and I always suggest that my audience keep it on at all times, and check out everything I suggest in their own experience.

The ideas I talk about point to a state of consciousness that is available to everyone. My job is to help people experience the reality of lucid living for themselves. It's an unusual way to make a living, but if you've managed to survive school with a surname

pronounced 'freak', you're up for anything!

THE GIFT OF THE PRESENT

The interview is going well. The charming talk-show host reverentially turns to the African professor who is joining us for this discussion to ask for his reactions to my books. He is smartly attired in traditional dress and clearly held in high regard as a spokesperson for the emerging African self-confidence. I'm surprised that he has even heard of me, let alone has an opinion about my work.

I sit in a state of pleased embarrassment as he enthuses at length about the importance of my ideas for Africans, saying that they reawaken an indigenous understanding that is in danger of being lost. He ends by boldly proclaiming that I'm a 'gift' to Africa. Our host is clearly moved as he announces portentously, 'You have been given a new name. Henceforth you will be known as 'Timothy "Gift" Freke.'

I feel so honoured that I'm lost for words. Where else but Africa could I be renamed live on TV? It feels good to be appreciated. I wish we would all spend more time appreciating each other. But I also know that I am not the real 'gift' that has touched my new African friends so deeply. The gift is the state of deep awake, which arises when we enter the mystery of the moment. And while this is something I can point to, ultimately it's something we must each experience for ourselves.

Ever since I spontaneously experienced the deep awake state for the first time, when I was 12 years old, I've felt passionately driven to share this ecstatic experience with others. And I soon discovered that when I was deep awake, others started waking up around me, because states of consciousness are catching.

My life has been an adventure of awakening. I've immersed myself in the world's spiritual traditions, which opened my mind. I've studied academic philosophy, which sharpened my mind. I've spent years in meditative retreat, which calmed my mind. And I've experimented with psychedelic drugs and shamanic power-plants, which blew my mind.

I've practised various spiritual techniques, which transformed my state of consciousness. I've explored the murky depths of my unconscious neuroses, which punctured my pride. I've worked with the dying, which opened my heart. And I've sat at the feet of charismatic gurus, who emptied my wallet.

In my 30s and 40s, I found myself writing a number of books on the major spiritual traditions of the world—Hinduism, Buddhism, Gnostic Christianity, Islamic Sufism, Shamanism, Hermeticism, Zen, Taoism, ancient Paganism—showing that they are all

essentially concerned with helping us become deep awake. And so I have become an 'authority' on world spirituality . . . at least, that's what it says on the back of my books But the truth is, I don't see myself as an 'authority' figure at all. I certainly have no interest in setting myself up as some sort of 'spiritual teacher', dispensing wisdom from a supposed exalted state that ordinary folk can't hope to emulate. I'm really turned off by all that elitist hype. I'm simply a passionate explorer of the mysteries of existence, reporting back from my expeditions into the uncharted regions of consciousness, to offer a road map to my fellow explorers who fancy making the trip themselves.

It was to avoid the role of 'spiritual teacher' that I started calling myself a 'stand-up philosopher'. I see myself as reinvigorating the ancient tradition in which philosophers were travelling performers who wandered from place to place, challenging people's 'commonsense' assumptions and opening their minds to new ways of seeing the world. I want to make philosophy fashionable again, so people care about what they think as much as they do about how they look.

Today philosophy is often dismissed as abstract and irrelevant, but the opposite is true. Changing the way we think transforms our experience of living. If we put up with a shallow, uninspiring understanding of what it is to be alive, we end up living shallow, uninspired lives. We exist on the surface of things, oblivious to the mysterious depths. We become members of the semiconscious crowd, rushing around as if there were no more to existence than making a living and not thinking about dying. We smother our need for meaning by willingly offering ourselves up to be mesmerized by the mass media into the collective coma we mistake for reality. Until eventually, stupefied by trivia, we become bored and tired of life.

Philosophy is usually perceived as a grown-up, serious business, but actually it is extremely childlike and playful. It's children, after all, who instinctively pose the big philosophical questions about life that grown-ups avoid asking. We adults enjoy being around happy children because it awakens memories of how we used to feel when being alive was a thrilling adventure, not a tiresome routine. It reminds us of a time when each day was a gift to be enjoyed, not a grind to be endured. As a stand-up philosopher, it's my job to be childlike enough to playfully question the close-mindedness that we confuse with maturity. And to suggest a new understanding of life that can wake us up to the real world of magic, mystery, and miracles.

LUCID DREAMING AND LUCID LIVING

It's the evening after my unusual TV interview, and life is as unpredictable as ever.

Tonight I'm performing alongside a collective of African poets, singers, and storytellers in Johannesburg. As I walk onstage, I catch a glimpse of my image in a mirror. Converging on my eyes are bold black-and-white lines of makeup.

Earlier this evening I was taken to a colourful traditional restaurant, where the waitress unexpectedly painted my face. And that's why I now find myself performing philosophy in downtown 'Jo'Burg' looking more like a warrior than a wordsmith. Philosophy has such a reputation for being dull and dusty, I've often fantasized about adding some glamour to my stand-up-philosophy gigs by mischievously wearing a little makeup. It's strange how things work out.

I begin by sharing my recent 'falafel' experience, which gets a laugh. Then I roam around the stage animatedly, which raises the energy, while I introduce myself, talk about my approach to philosophy, and crack some jokes. Now I feel ready to begin exploring the big questions that fascinate me. I'm going to take this part of the show real slow, because I want to share some challenging ideas. So I become very still, and the audience becomes alert and concentrated. Then I jump in with the simplest and deepest question I know:

> What is life? What is this strange flow of shapes and colours and sounds and thoughts that we're experiencing? What is this moment right now?
>
> I want to make an outrageous suggestion . . .
>
> Things are not what they seem to be, and you're not who you think you are . . . because life is like a dream and you are the dreamer.
>
> I want to suggest that normally we're pretty unconscious, but it's possible to experience an ultraconscious state of being deep awake, in which we realize that life is like a dream. I'm not offering this as an abstract possibility. I'm hanging out in this state right now, and simply describing what I'm experiencing.
>
> And it seems to me that the deep awake state is similar to lucid dreaming, only it's happening while I'm awake. That's why I call it 'lucid living'.
>
> You may have had a lucid dream at some time. Lucid dreaming is dreaming consciously. Normally we're unconsciously engrossed in our dreams. But occasionally we become more conscious. The dream continues, but we know that

we're dreaming.

I'm experiencing something similar now. I'm deep awake and living lucidly, because I'm conscious that life is like a dream.

When I live lucidly, it profoundly changes my understanding of who I am, since I see that essentially there is one primal awareness dreaming itself to be everyone and everything.

I am the primal awareness imagining itself to be 'Tim'. You are the primal awareness imagining itself to be 'you'. We appear to be separate individuals, but essentially there is one of us.

This is the perennial message at the heart of all spiritual traditions, and it is something you can know for yourself if you carefully examine your experience of the present moment. So let's do that together now . . .

THE NEW EDGE TRIBE

The gig has gone well, and the room is buzzing with big love. My provocative ideas and the African artists' songs and poems have harmonized beautifully, creating a feeling of deep communion and ecstatic vision. It always blows me away how intoxicatingly sweet it is when we connect through the illusion of separateness that seems to divide us.

I'm winding down, drinking a beer with some of the other performers, when a young black singer with the most penetrating eyes takes me by the hand. He looks at me intensely and tells me solemnly:

Although our skin is of a different colour and we were born into different cultures, we come from the same tribe.

I can't tell you how good this feels for a middle-aged, middle-class, white boy from affluent England.

The striking young singer's words reverberate in my mind because I can see that he's right. There's a new tribe arising to which we both belong. A tribe of people drawn together by choice, not circumstance. A tribe united not by race or geography or history, but by a shared experience of the new consciousness that is emerging at the cutting

edge of evolution. A tribe that has rejected the old idea of 'us and them' and replaced it with the profound realization that there is only 'us'. A tribe that knows we are all one.

When I first started the work of waking people up to oneness, I found that only a handful of individuals seemed open to such a radical message. But over the years I've seen this change. Now I find that more and more men and women come up to me after my presentations and say things like:

> Thank you for helping me understand so clearly what I've been experiencing in my own life but couldn't put into words.

And that's when it hits me: I have to write a philosophy book that can wake us up, designed for the new tribe emerging at the cutting edge of evolution. It will be the fruition of more than three decades of living on the edge, in which I have become familiar with the deep awake state and have developed simple ways of helping people live lucidly.

I've written a lot of books already, but this one will be different. I want to make my ideas even more accessible and relevant. I need to show that waking up to oneness and big love is a real experience that transforms everyday life. The problem is that writing about waking up is like explaining a joke, when what I really want is people to get the joke and fall over laughing.

How can I take others to the deep awake state? Perhaps by authentically recounting my own experiences and what they have taught me? My life is what I have to offer others. Previously I've written about philosophical ideas, but now the time has come to explore these ideas in a more personal book. I could write it as a series of anecdotal vignettes, like a postmodern film, and let the reader piece the story line together scene by scene.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND ENLIVENMENT

I've found a quiet spot to drink my beer and think about our collective awakening. Mystics have been talking about the deep awake state for centuries. But I have a strong sense that the time has finally come to take the wisdom of oneness out of the mystical ghetto and into mainstream culture. And to do this we need ways of communicating timeless teachings that are designed for the 21st century. Everything must evolve . . . including our understanding of the deep awake state.

Although I've been heavily influenced by my studies of spirituality, these days I find

most established spiritual traditions to be weighed down by religious ways of thinking that are well past their sell-by date. In their day, traditional forms of spirituality were dangerously radical, but now they've become safely conservative. They can't free us from the past because they are the past. We need something fresh to take us over the new edge.

In particular, I don't like it when traditional forms of spirituality present the deep awake state as the preserve of an 'enlightened' elite, because it seems to me it's a natural state available to all. It's not a 'spiritual Oscar' awarded to those fanatically devoted to intense practices. Indeed, the whole idea of spiritual 'discipline' makes waking up sound about as much fun as going to the dentist.

I also have problems with any puritanical rejection of sexuality, intoxication, and pleasure in general. When the world is described as 'the devil's playground', this just makes it sound more attractive to me. In my experience, life on the new edge is wickedly playful.

I want a spirituality that's passionate about life. After all, the delights of this world are so rich and various that it seems criminal not to appreciate them. Just drinking this beer . . . the coolness, the bubbles, the feeling of refreshment . . . it's all so intensely pleasurable when I really enter into my sensations. That has to be a good thing!

In my experience, being deep awake is both a state of transcendental enlightenment and embodied enlivenment. It's knowing that all is one and enjoying the play of separateness from that perspective. And this is why I find the concept of 'lucid living' so powerful. When I dream lucidly, the dream doesn't end—I simply start to dream consciously. In the same way, when I live lucidly, the life-dream doesn't stop, I simply start to live more consciously. And this is the secret to really enjoying the life-dream.

SPIRITUAL JUNK FOOD

I'm taking a night flight back to the U.K. The cabin lights are off and I'm sitting with my eyes closed, allowing my imagination to roam. Right now I'm considering a question that is troubling me. Regardless of age, class, or race, there is a growing body of us who are in the process of becoming deep awake, yet our numbers are still extremely small. Why doesn't everyone wake up? What is standing in the way?

I usually assume the problem is that we're just not ready to wake up. But maybe there's more to it than that? Perhaps the problem also lies with the state of modern spirituality? Spirituality has the role of waking us up, but is it up to the job?

There's a gullibility that pervades modern spirituality. As a philosopher, this disturbs

me because without rational doubt, we easily become lost in fantasy, rather than waking up to reality. Modern spirituality needs to consider what philosophers call 'epistemology'. Before we can say 'what we know', we need to think about 'how we know it'.

Do we take channelled wisdom from the ascended masters residing in the Pleiades at face value? Or do we stop and ask ourselves, 'How can I check if this is for real?' We need to keep an open mind and listen to our intuition, for life is strange and anything is possible. But we also need to be savvy and judicious.

Many people today, however, are consuming large amounts of spiritual junk food without chewing—so there's an epidemic of philosophical indigestion. We've become so transfixed with the mysteries of the crop circles and the crystal skulls that we're ignoring the real mystery . . . which is that we exist and don't know what to do about it!

And here's another thing that bothers me. I hate all the sanctimonious seriousness and saccharine niceness so often associated with being 'spiritual'. It gets in the way of our being authentic with each other. Some of the new 'gurus' are so safely bland it's like listening to elevator music. That's not going to enliven us. It's going to put us to sleep in a comfortable spiritual cocoon.

For me, the real heroes of the new edge of evolution are radically real people like the late Bill Hicks . . . a comic genius who took us to big love via his own unique brand of taboo-breaking, consciousness-raising, misanthropic humour Even though Bill Hicks is dead now, if I had the choice of hanging out with him or Swami Blandananda, it would be no contest.

Damn it! I think I'm beginning to become a channel myself. I can hear Bill's manic Texan drawl raving in my ears:

> Listen up! I've got some really good news! Everything is okay!
>
> Being alive is weird and scary and never really makes sense, but that's all right because life is like a dream . . . so there's nothing to be alarmed about . . . it all turns out all right in the end . . . because when you die in a dream, you wake up.
>
> But before you bow out, why not enjoy the show . . . because it's a thrilling roller coaster of a ride . . . and when you stop worrying about falling off, you can just throw your hands up in the air and yell 'Bring it on!' . . . as you career through the highs and lows of the ever-changing moment . . . toward the sign marked 'exit'.

Heh! I know what I'm talking about because I'm dead! The way to enjoy the trip is to lighten up, not tighten up!

If you take things too seriously, you'll be popping Prozac just to cope with the anxiety . . . and when 'numb' becomes 'normal', every day will be a monotonous cycle of drudgery. Then you'll remember all the things you need to get done . . . but forget the most important thing about life . . . and that's this . . .

IT'S HAPPENING RIGHT NOW AND IT'S TOTALLY AWESOME!

For some reason the cabin lights have just gone on, and I'm conscious that I've been ranting to myself. It's just an expression of my frustration with the state of modern spirituality. I'm really a 'love junkie' who hates being critical, so I feel embarrassed by my bombast . . . although no one was listening except me.

Actually, of course, there's room for a whole spectrum of approaches to waking up. Spirituality, like music, is a matter of taste. Some people like classical spirituality and others like pop. I get impatient with both, because I want things to be accessible without sacrificing depth. But it's no good just carping on about what I don't like. I need to offer my own idiosyncratic approach as another option.

That's what I'll do in my new book. And if spirituality were music, I'd like it to combine the irreverent iconoclasm of rock 'n' roll, the sophistication of acid jazz, the clarity of minimalist glitch, the big heart of old-school soul, the infectious drive of funky breakbeat . . . and, in an ideal world, the mass appeal of big-hit bubblegum!

Then the flight attendant says, 'Please fasten your safety belts; we're experiencing turbulence.' And this brings my attention to how uncomfortably narrow my seat is, and how much I wish the chunky guy next to me wouldn't keep prodding me with his elbow . . . which makes me question my aspirations. Maybe I should just go for spiritual bubblegum and the big bucks? Because in the future, I need to be travelling first class.

COMING HOME

My little girl won't stop hugging me. My teenage son is also pleased to see me, although he's less inclined to show it demonstratively. My wife, Debbie, is looking even more gorgeous than I remembered. It's good to be back home from South Africa to life as a family man. I need time off from presenting myself as the fascinating thinker on TV and the charismatic performer onstage. Now I need to worry about paying the bills and

fixing the dishwasher.

There was a time when such mundane concerns were a burden to me because they seemed so trivial compared to exploring the mysteries of existence. And yet the strange thing is that the more I've experienced the ecstatic joy of being deep awake, the more I've come to appreciate the miracle of every moment. The more I've recognized that all is one, the more I've fallen in love with this separate individual named 'Tim' . . . and his extraordinarily ordinary life.

CHAPTER 2. THE MYSTERY OF THE MOMENT

I'm sitting with my dog on a quiet hill overlooking my small hometown and all of its insignificant busyness. I'm 12 years old, and I'm thinking about some big questions that fascinate me: *Why are we here? What's the purpose of life? What happens after death? What should I do with my life? Why is there so much suffering in the world? How can I be truly happy? How can I really help others?*

I'm convinced that I've been born on the wrong planet because I clearly don't belong here. Being alive is so profoundly strange, yet the grown-ups around me seem to just take everything for granted. It's as if they've fallen into some sort of coma and don't notice that they're alive. Or perhaps they've secretly agreed never to talk about the big questions of life, but to anaesthetize themselves with trivia.

Everyone goes about their daily business as if they know exactly what life is all about. But I can see that no one's really got a clue as to what's going on. Most people just go along with whatever ideas are currently in vogue, whether they're about makeup, music, or the nature of reality. Something inside of me rages against their inane, unquestioning, 'commonsense' approach to life. I refuse to believe that my purpose in this extravagant universe could be to climb a career ladder, buy a house, and get a pension plan. Life is too important to waste just making money and acquiring things. Life is like an enormous question that demands an answer.

And then, unexpectedly and inexplicably, it happens. . . .

My train of thought jolts to a halt, and the whole world starts vibrating, sending seismic shudders through my soul. I feel as if the top of my head has just come off and the sky has poured in. I'm overwhelmed by awesome, unfathomable, breathtaking mystery. I don't know anything. Nobody knows anything. Life is a miracle of such enormous proportions that the mind can't possibly comprehend it.

I seem to have inexplicably slipped into another reality in which the colours are brighter and the birds sing symphonies. I'm immersed in wonder. I feel a bizarre sense of oneness with everything around me, as if I'm the universe looking at itself, amazed by its own beauty. I'm utterly happy for no reason at all. I feel certain beyond doubt of the goodness of all that is.

The humdrum world has peeled away like a superficial veneer, revealing a secret garden that I've always suspected was close by. I know this place. It feels like home. But how can it be so familiar when it's unlike anything I've ever experienced? I have no idea what is happening to me. But I know that my life will never be the same again. And I know that the answer I'm searching for so desperately is not a clever theory about life.

It's this experience of wonder in which all of my questions dissolve.

And then there is sudden, deep silence. I'm consumed by the sensation of sinking, as if I'm being engulfed by an ocean of bliss. Spasms of relaxation ripple through my young body, and I feel embraced by such a love that tears of relief spring spontaneously to my eyes. The entire vast universe is pulsating with limitless love. It is held together by love. And I am that love. There is only love. I've been born to experience this moment.

A JOURNEY OF AWAKENING

It's Monday morning, and my wife and I have successfully negotiated getting our children off to school. Sleepy bodies have been washed, dressed, and filled with fuel for the day. The lost gym bag has been found. The pretence of having a sore throat has been seen through. The TV has been turned off, and the kids have been bundled out the door. Now I'm sitting in my spacious office at the end of our funky little garden, working on this book that you're reading.

I wanted to start by telling you about my first deep awake experience as a boy because it has been the seed from which my life has grown. I don't know how long that experience lasted, since it had a timeless quality, but it probably wasn't long. I eventually made my way down the hill, back to my life as a kid in small-town England. But something had changed.

I was now on a quest to understand what had happened to me so that I could find a way back to the secret garden. I'd embarked on a journey of awakening, which is still continuing today. And throughout this journey, I've found myself waking up to oneness and big love again and again, often at the most unexpected times. It's a state I've come to know well and return to regularly.

In this book I'm going to share some of my deep awake experiences with you, along with what they have taught me. I'll begin by taking you progressively deeper into the experience of lucid living so that you'll be able to taste the bliss of big love for yourself. Then we'll explore how, when we're in this ultraconscious state, everyday life becomes transformed into a wonderful adventure full of meaning, miracles, and magic. Finally, I'm going to help you avoid some common spiritual misunderstandings that can prevent you from waking up, offer you a radically new understanding of the nature of death, and explore how we can co-create a deep awake world. So I think you'll find that it's gonna be an exciting trip!

The philosophy I'm going to share with you is the mystical heart of spirituality, so it's very deep and powerfully transformative. I've done all I can to make these ideas as

accessible as possible, but they're so different from our so-called commonsense view of life that they may well seem strange at first. Be patient with yourself if you find some parts of this book easier to follow than others. And stay open to the possibility that ideas that don't resonate with you at first may make more sense as we go along.

Throughout the book, I'll suggest that you experiment with various wake-up techniques so that you go beyond the ideas to the actual experience of being deep awake. We all have different temperaments, so some of the wake-up techniques I suggest may work well for you, but other techniques may not. That's okay. Just focus on what works for you.

Some of the deep awake experiences I'm going to relate are pretty dramatic, but it might not be like that in your experience. My own journey has been marked by sudden bursts of greater consciousness and new insights. But I know plenty of very awake people whose journeys have been characterized by gentle development.

This book is about waking up and living lucidly, but trying to wake up is like trying to fall in love—it's a natural process that happens when it happens. Even so, there are things we can do to create the space for a natural awakening to occur.

We can be authentically open to the possibility of experiencing a new state of consciousness. We can change our understanding of life and look at reality with new eyes. And we can explore the present moment using simple wake-up techniques. This book will help you do these things. And my greatest hope is that when our time together comes to an end, you'll find yourself living lucidly.

THE EVER-PRESENT MYSTERY

When I woke up as a 12-year-old, I had no idea why my state of consciousness had changed so unexpectedly. Looking back, however, I can see that I'd focused so intensely on how strange life seemed to me that it catapulted me into the mystery. And ever since, I've found that when I focus my attention on how mysterious existence is, my state of consciousness changes and I start to wake up. In my experience, the mystery of this moment is an open doorway to the deep awake state—and we can step through whenever we like.

The problem is that normally we're so unconscious that we don't even notice the mystery, even though it actually is utterly obvious. Right now, for instance, I'm sitting before my computer screen, staring at this jumble of words. In many ways it's an ordinary day for Tim the author, because I've done this countless times before. There's nothing strange about it. And yet, when I really pay attention to what's happening, I see

that it's profoundly mysterious.

Thoughts are arising in my consciousness, but what is consciousness exactly? And what is a 'thought'? And where do they keep coming from? I'm told that it's something to do with the porridge in my head, where millions of neurons are firing away, encoding my ideas into language. And then I'm encoding these words into symbolic marks on the page. And you're looking at these marks, which the porridge in *your* head is decoding back into words, so my thoughts are arising in *your* consciousness. Through this incredible play of forms, two conscious beings are connecting with each other. How amazing!

Now I'm noticing my hands typing on the keyboard. They feel so solid and real. Yet the physicists I hang out with tell me that my body is mostly empty space. Right now there are zillions of cosmic particles passing straight through my body, through the earth, and out the other side without touching anything. I'm mostly nothing! It's impossible to get my head around that.

The human predicament is so astonishingly strange it amazes me that we aren't in a permanent state of confusion. Here we are . . . clever monkeys clinging to a lump of rock, hurtling around a giant nuclear-power station in the sky, in a solar system of such enormous proportions that to imagine it makes our brains go pop! And that's just our solar system, since there are more than 100 billion stars! And that's just in our galaxy, since there more than 100 billion galaxies!

It makes me laugh when TV documentaries say that scientists are on the verge of explaining the universe, as if to assure us that someone somewhere knows what's going on. But the truth is that science has simply confounded the problem. Life looks even weirder now than it did before. In the past, we accepted things as they seemed to be . . . the earth was flat, the sky was up, solid objects were solid objects. Science has presented us with a far stranger world that undermines all of these commonsense assumptions. It has led us deeper into the mystery, as great scientists such as Newton and Einstein fully recognized.

Recently, I read in a scientific journal that only 4 percent of the universe is made of matter as we know it. The other 96 percent is . . . who knows what?! In light of this, it seems to me that anyone who is certain that they know what life's about is clearly mad . . . and dangerous.

The more I learn, the more bizarre life becomes. After more than three decades of exploration, all I really know is what I discovered when I unexpectedly entered the deep awake state as a boy: Life is a mystery. And if you dive deeply into the mystery, you'll be so pleased that you did, because this is the most awesome experience possible.

A CONCEPTUAL MATRIX

This is very cool. I'm performing at an unusual London nightclub called 'OneTaste', which is dedicated to entertainment that alters consciousness. I'm on the bill with some excellent poets and singers. The audience of mainly young people is sitting around small, dimly lit tables; and the atmosphere is electric. I pause for as long as I dare to allow the crowd to come into stillness . . . and then I begin:

> I was reading the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins recently, and he was explaining that our brains construct a model of the world that we move around in, which he describes as 'a kind of virtual-reality simulation of the world'.
>
> Isn't that interesting? It's just like in The Matrix, except we're not living in a computer-generated reality; we're inhabiting a world constructed from ideas. We're living in a conceptual matrix created by the mind, which helps us understand the awesome mystery of existence.

Then I announce with a flourish:

> Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, I want to set us free from our conceptual incarceration so that we can experience together the transformation in consciousness that occurs when we step out of the matrix and into the mystery. And I'm going to do this by performing an amazing magic trick.

I take off my watch, hold it up before the crowd, and announce:

> I'm going to make this watch disappear.

Then, backpedaling on this audacious claim, I explain,

> Actually, I'm going to show you how to make the watch disappear . . . using no more than the power of your imagination.

I wave the watch around dramatically and ask, 'What do you see?' The audience kindly plays along by calling out 'a watch.'

Okay. Now I want you to imagine that you don't come from this culture. You have been born in the deepest jungles of Borneo and don't know anything about Western civilization. And then you inexplicably find yourself here with this bald-headed man waving something in front of you.

I pause for people to attempt this impossible task, and then I ask,

Do you see a watch now?

The room is hushed in puzzled concentration for a moment and some voices call out,

No,

so I continue,

That's right. You only see a watch when you have the concept of 'watch'. If you came from the jungles of Borneo, you'd see whatever you could conceptualize. You might see 'leather' or 'bracelet' or 'round metal object', but you wouldn't see 'watch'. Only if I explained to you the Western idea of time, how we measure it, and how we represent its passage with a clock would you see 'watch'.

We are conscious of what we can conceptualize. As I look around me now, I see that I have a concept for everything I'm conscious of . . . 'stage' . . . 'lights' . . . 'microphone' . . . 'people' . . . 'Tim' . . . everything! Is it like that for you, too? Have a look for yourself . . .

Several people in the audience are smiling broadly, which is always a sign that they can see what I'm saying. It can be pretty bizarre when they really start to get it, so I explain,

We're experiencing this moment through a filter of concepts. We're living in our ideas. We're telling ourselves a story about who we are and what life is, and we're confusing this story with reality. But the story is not reality. Reality is the mystery of existence that exists before all of our ideas about reality.

We've become bamboozled by our beliefs, and this has blinded us to the primal

mystery. We've become so engrossed with our stories that we've lost the plot. We're eating the menu, not the meal, and that's why life can taste so bland.

The room is very still now, and I can see from their faces that some people are experiencing the strange reality shift that philosophy can induce. Then I ask,

What happens if we put aside our ideas for a moment and enter a profound state of not knowing? What happens if we step out of confines of the conceptual mind into the spacious openness of the mystery?

LOVING LIFE OR JUST GETTING ON WITH IT

I'm drinking a cappuccino at a pavement café and people watching. It's a favourite pastime of mine because I can see that everyone is living in a story about who he or she is and what life is.

That guy over there with the briefcase looks like he lives in a world in which succeeding is what matters . . . although he's secretly worried that he might be a loser. The pretty young woman reading the magazine hasn't decided who she is yet . . . but she's considering a story that revolves around becoming a model with enormous breasts. The nervous father pushing the stroller, on the other hand, looks like he's just had his whole story turned upside down . . . but he seems to be enjoying it.

We all live in a story. Mine is the story of 'Tim' . . . the philosopher plumbing the depths of life . . . the father trying to support a family . . . the author attempting to write a bestseller. I can't tell you how much I love my story. But sometimes I become so lost in my dramas that I don't notice the underlying mystery of existence. And then life starts to go dead on me.

It's like when a romantic relationship loses its magic.

Look at that young couple window-shopping—right now they're so in love. You know what it's like. You meet someone and they seem so amazing. They're a mystery to you, and you're a mystery to them. And when you meet in that mystery, you say that you're in love with each other. It feels as if you're walking on sunshine and life is sweet. But as time goes by, things usually change.

And that, I'm guessing, is exactly what's happened to the middle-aged woman arguing with her husband at the table opposite from mine. He used to see her as a sublime mystery, but over the years he's adopted a lot of limiting ideas about her. Now he's put her into a conceptual box, so she feels cramped and confined. He can no longer see the

mystery she really is because he's relating to an idea of who she is. This is preventing them from authentically connecting, so the magic has gone from their relationship. When that happens, we say that we've fallen out of love . . . which is exactly right.

I find that it's the same with life. When I put the mystery of existence into a conceptual box, the magic goes. I stop loving my life and I start just getting on with it. But when I step out of my story into the mystery, it's as if I've suddenly remembered that I'm alive again, and I find myself falling in love with everything and everyone.

I'm conscious of the mystery now, and all of my superficial judgements are dissolving. I love the middle-aged woman for giving her husband a hard time, since she so much wants them to be together in the mystery again. I love the new father for embracing a change of direction that fills him with fear of the future. I love the businessman for his ambition and the pretty young woman for her naïveté. Who knows where their strange lives will lead? Maybe to the ever-present mystery of this moment?

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STORY

It's been a very special night. Sharing my philosophy at the One-Taste club has allowed everyone present to taste the oneness together. Now I'm having fun taking questions from the audience. A lot of people seem really attracted to the ideas I've been sharing. But now a sharply dressed man at the back is about to speak, and I can see from his expression that he's sceptical:

> This notion that I can just let go of my story and step into the mystery is utter nonsense. If I did let go of my story, I'd be an amnesiac, for goodness' sake. I wouldn't know where I am or how to get home. I wouldn't be deep awake; I'd be profoundly lost.

I feel resistance to his comment in the room because we've been playing in the mystery for some time, and most people are reluctant to go back to critical thinking quite yet. But I'm happy for him to push me, because doubt makes us more conscious, so I reply:

> Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that we should abandon our stories about life because, as you say, this would leave us utterly disoriented.
>
> Actually, we're only conscious at all because we're discriminating everything with concepts. Without concepts we wouldn't differentiate individual things in the

amorphous oneness of 'what-is'.

Ideas are great. I love them. But that doesn't mean we have to be so mesmerized by our ideas that we miss the mystery. We need a story to help us navigate our lives. But it's possible to also see beyond the story to the mystery. It's not either/or . . . it's both/and.

The mystery and the story are polarities that coexist in the moment, and we need to be conscious of both. As I'm speaking to you, I'm conscious of the mystery, but I'm also conscious of the story of Tim. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be able to engage in this stimulating conversation.

The man at the back still looks uneasy and needs to push me harder, so he continues,

I have to say that my experience of the mystery hasn't been good. A few years ago I really lost the plot in my story, and it took me to the edge of a mental breakdown. Before this happened, I had a strong sense of my own identity and where I was going in life. Then suddenly nothing made sense, and I felt totally lost. Without my story, life seemed meaningless, and I became depressed. I wouldn't recommend that to anyone.

Now we're getting somewhere. He's not questioning me out of intellectual curiosity. This really matters to him, so I'm careful with my response:

I've also experienced my story breaking down so that I was unable to make sense of my life. I know it's not a good place to be, which is why I'm not recommending that you abandon your story and just be conscious of the mystery.

In my case, what happened was this. I became so engrossed in my story that I was unconscious of the mystery, which meant that I no longer felt truly alive. Eventually I felt so confined by the story that I detonated the whole thing to set myself free. I unconsciously catapulted myself into the state of 'not-knowing'. And as I didn't know what was happening, I panicked. This made me cling desperately to the remnants of my story, but it just wasn't working anymore. So I started drowning in meaninglessness.

> However, there's nothing so bad that good can't come from it. And there was a positive side to this experience because when the dust settled, my story came back together . . . but in a new way. I had a deeper understanding of Tim and his world. The breakdown became a breakthrough.
>
> From what I hear, many of us have experienced something like this. In some cases, the breakdown can be precipitated by some unpleasant event that our story is just not big enough to make meaningful. And in extreme cases, it's impossible to put things back together without professional assistance. But for most of us, it's a phase on the journey of awakening that, in retrospect, was necessary and even benign. . . . Was it like this in your experience?

He thinks about this for a while and then replies,

> I guess it was. Things have moved on. Life has gotten better.

I continue,

> So here's the thing. We don't need to have a breakdown to have a breakthrough. We don't need to wait until we're so entrenched in our story that the only way out is through some sort of violent psychological revolution. We can be conscious of the mystery right now, without dismantling our story. And then there's room for the story to naturally evolve and deepen, since we can see new possibilities all the time.

Now he's looking more relaxed and his tone of voice softens,

> I can see that. My story has evolved listening to you this evening. And it's been a painless experience . . . most of the time.

We both laugh, and so does the audience. Then I say,

> Well, I'm glad about that because, as a philosopher, I'm in the business of changing people's stories. And if we must have a story, then it seems to me that we'd better make it a good one.

> Superficial stories lead to superficial lives. Deep ideas allow deep experiences. Philosophy is about finding the best story possible. And for me, that means a story that includes the possibility of becoming deep awake.
>
> The paradox of our predicament is that to wake up, we need to see beyond our story to the mystery. But we also need a story to become deep awake. It's much more difficult to wake up when your story of life excludes this possibility.
>
> And if you were lucky enough to stumble upon the deep awake state, like I did as a boy, you wouldn't know how to get back there, because your story will have nothing to say about this.
>
> I've spent my whole life working up a story about life that can help me become deep awake.

The man at the back looks genuinely intrigued, so I add with a cheeky grin,

> I'm going to explore this story in the new book I'm writing at the moment. Maybe you should preorder a copy?

He smiles back playfully and says,

> I can't tell if that was an answer or a sales pitch.

And that makes the crowd clap, because my audiences tend to appreciate smart-assed mavericks.

CONSIDER THE OBVIOUS

I'm hanging out in the deep awake state right now, and I'd love for you to join me. All you need to do is become conscious of the mystery of the moment. This doesn't require you to abandon your story, only for you to place it to one side for a while and focus your attention on the most obvious thing about your predicament . . . that it's profoundly enigmatic.

You can do this now by focusing on the feeling that there is much more to life than you understand. Most people relegate this feeling of uncertainty to the background of

the mind, where it can be conveniently ignored. But if you bring it into the foreground of your attention, something interesting will start to happen to your state of consciousness.

Sometimes it can feel frightening to dive into the mystery. We want to hold on to something because we associate not being certain about things with feeling confused and anxious. But dissolving into the mystery is actually an experience of ecstatic liberation, not worried perplexity.

It can be terrifying when we hover nervously on the outskirts of the mystery, but when we unconditionally let go into the mystery, there's nothing to fear. When we finally recognize that we truly know nothing, there is an exhilarating feeling of freedom and an overwhelming sense of wonder.

The mystery of life is so utterly obvious that it's astonishing we miss it so much of the time. We are like fish not noticing water. We are conscious of the eddies in the flow and the changes in temperature, but we don't see that it's all water. Normally we're so engrossed with our stories about life that we miss the ever-present mystery. But as soon as we step out of our story . . . there it is in all of its unfathomable glory.

Throughout my life, I've found that simply becoming conscious of the mystery wakes me up. The trick is to recognize when I've become lost in the story of Tim. The telltale clues are that I've become certain about things and overly anxious . . . and that I've lost my sense of humour Then I simply step out of my story and into the mystery of the moment. I remember that I'm alive and how awesome that is.

When I see beyond my ideas about life, there's a wonderful feeling of oneness with all that is, since it's only my concepts that make me see things as separate. And when I know that essentially all is one, I find myself in love with life, because love is how oneness feels. So when I bring my attention back to the dramas I'm confronting, I see things through new eyes. And the more I hang out in the mystery, the easier it becomes to wake up the next time I'm lost in the story of Tim.

CHAPTER 3. THE BREATH OF LIFE

It's a dull, overcast day, and I'm sitting in a coffeehouse talking philosophy with my fellow student Anthony Taylor. I love his company because he combines a penetrating mind with a kind heart and calming presence. In the unimagined future, Anthony will go on to become the Director of the Alliance for Lucid Living, an organization designed to promote our collective awakening. But right now we are still in our early 20s. And it's the final year of our studies at the University of Bristol before we earn our BA degrees in Western philosophy.

I've thrown myself passionately into my studies, but I've also become increasingly disillusioned with academic philosophy, which seems dry and abstract, not remotely 'life changing'. But at least I've learned how to doubt deeply and think clearly. Maybe too clearly, because I've become a bit of a philosophical buccaneer who enjoys demolishing other people's opinions with a flourish of my sharp intellect.

For some time I've been so focused on my mental development that I haven't given much attention to being deep awake. Then a few weeks ago, something strange spontaneously started happening. I was sitting at my desk in my apartment writing an essay on existentialism, when I had the disquieting feeling of a vast emptiness opening up before me and inviting me into it. Intuitively, I knew that I should let go into the emptiness, but I was simply too scared to do so.

Over the course of the next few days, this happened a few times, and each time I held out. Now I'm sitting drinking coffee in this busy little café and it's happening again. It may be because I'm with Anthony, but this time I don't feel frightened. So I take him by the hands and interrupt our conversation, saying:

> Something weird is happening, Tony. Look out for me because I'm going to let go into it.

Anthony is intrigued and asks me to describe what I'm experiencing. I'm going to find this difficult, but I'll give it a go . . .

> My body is starting to vibrate . . . and so is the café.

> Everything seems spacious and empty . . . if that makes any sense?

> Something is happening to my breath. And it feels delicious. It's as if the whole

universe is breathing me.

I've never noticed before how exquisite it is just to breathe. I feel consumed by the experience of breathing. And the more I let go into my breath, the more intensely alive I feel . . .

This is awesome. I couldn't possibly want for any more than to be here breathing. I'm completely in love with this moment. There's so much love that it's utterly overwhelming. . . .

I'm smiling manically as I look across at Anthony. I can see from his face that he's also beginning to enter the same amazing breath experience. States of consciousness are catching!

So we sit there for a while in the vibrating café, staring into each other's eyes and grinning like idiots, oblivious to the other coffee drinkers chatting around us. Then Anthony suggests,

Let's go to Brandon Hill.

In that magical way that life works, when we step outside it's like a new day. The sun is shining in a clear blue sky. The colours are bright and the sounds are crisp. The world seems alive and wonderfully mysterious. I feel as if the life force that is breathing me is the same life force that is animating everything.

As we make our way up the grassy inclines of Brandon Hill, we are laughing uncontrollably like children. And all I can say over and over again is,

This breath . . . this breath . . . this breath . . .

At the top of the hill we sit together overlooking the sprawling metropolis of Bristol city, feeling a rich contentment that only the shared silence can express. Life is good. We are deep awake.

PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

I'm in a lecture on the philosophy of religion. The young woman who's speaking is exploring rational proofs for the existence of God, and I'm having real trouble

containing my giggles, which keep slipping out and disturbing the lecture. The breath experience is happening again, and I feel constantly on the edge of laughter . . . for no particular reason.

My first breath experience lasted for a few hours, but three days later it came back. I was in a nightclub listening to an old American blues singer . . . with Anthony again. And this time the experience has continued. Whenever I pay attention to my breath, it feels exquisite, and I find myself sinking into the mystery of the moment. I'm totally present to the miracle of living.

This has been a blissful period in my life, which has made my academic studies seem rather silly. I came to university looking for intellectual answers, but now I've remembered what I discovered when I was 12. The real answer to my questions lies in a transformation of consciousness.

As soon as exams are over, I'm going to find a quiet place in the country where I can live a simple life and really explore what happens when I dive deeply into this breath experience. I've read so many books—I've had enough of words. Now I want to explore the silence and see what it can teach me.

Then the lecturer says something that makes me burst out laughing. She has just spent three-quarters of an hour expounding a traditional 'proof' for the existence of God, and then demolished it completely in a couple of minutes. But this is completely missing the point. The existence of God isn't something you can prove with logical arguments. 'God' is a word for the mysterious life force in everything. And I'm experiencing the reality of that all-embracing life force right now.

ENTER THERE

It's a beautiful summer day, and I'm sitting in a meadow by a pretty pink cottage, where I've come for a year of meditative retreat after finishing my academic studies. During this time I've spent long periods focusing on my breath, and I've found that this brings me into the mystery of the moment, so I begin to experience the deep awake state.

Right now I'm paddling my feet in the stream that runs through the meadow. And I'm thinking about an old Zen story in which a student asks about enlightenment, and the master simply replies,

Can you hear the sound of that babbling brook?

Enter there.

I love this story because it offers such a simple way to wake up. And it's working for me because as I focus on the tinkling tones of the stream, my state of consciousness is changing and I'm sinking into the deep awake state.

I have discovered that when I focus on any of my sensations, this disengages my attention from my story, and I start to feel immersed in mystery. I usually choose to focus on my breath—since it's always there, I can pay attention to it whenever I want. And I find that it is very pleasurable to sink into my breath, which helps as I'm a big fan of pleasure.

The philosopher Epicurus suggested that we become more conscious of pleasure, seeking out simpler and simpler pleasures until we become conscious of the immense pleasure of simply being. That's how I use my breath. I witness the pleasure of breathing, and then I find myself bathing in the bliss of being.

As I sit here in the meadow, I'm conscious of the smooth sensuality of my breath. I'm conscious of the music of the running water. I'm conscious of being deep awake. And now . . . unfortunately . . . I'm also conscious of how much the sound of running water is making me want to pee, so I'm going to have to dash inside.

THE MOMENT IS ENOUGH

I wanted to tell you about my breath experience because I still find that focusing on my breath takes me into the mystery of the moment. I've been exploring this wake-up technique ever since my experience with Anthony in the coffeehouse. It's simple and powerful . . . and I recommend you try it.

After graduating from university, I stayed as a guest with the novices at a beautiful Franciscan friary, as it was the perfect place for a spiritual retreat. I'd previously run away to this friary after an argument with my father when I was 15, so I already knew the Guardian, Brother Bernard, who became a lifelong mentor and friend. During my time at the friary, I developed a reputation as the young student who was always in the chapel 'praying'. I'm sure I seemed very devout, but the truth was that all I wanted to do was focus on breathing, since it felt so amazing. There was nothing holy about it. I was just sinking into bliss, and I didn't want to stop.

For a while I considered becoming a friar. I still had a student apartment in Bristol, and I wondered what would happen if I simply never returned. I had visions of my belongings taunting me, saying, 'But we're your things, you've got to come back for us.'

And I did go back. Not for my things . . . but because I knew I loved women too

much to be celibate.

When I left the friary, I rented the little pink cottage by the meadow, and it became my sanctuary. I was known locally as 'Tim of the meadows' . . . that odd guy who spends all of his time meditating and practising Tai Chi Chuan, which my landlord called 'that funny Chinese dancing.' I had nothing. I lived frugally. I did very little. Yet I had never been happier.

I spent my first night there curled up in front of a log fire reading The Way of Zen by Alan Watts. In one passage he explained that waking up wasn't an idea you could understand by reading a book; it was something to experience. I spontaneously threw the book on the fire and settled down to meditate. And that's pretty much all I did for the next year.

During this time I found that entering my breath was like sinking into a warm bath, which dissolved away all of my worries and anxieties, leaving me in love with life. And I realized something hugely important, which has shaped the rest of my life . . . I can be perfectly content just to breathe.

I've found this extremely liberating, because it's freed me from the need to seek fulfilment through all of the 'normal' channels . . . wealth, success, power, fame. I already have all I need, and no one can take it away from me. No matter what fate might befall me, I know that it's possible to sink into my breath and enter the mystery of the moment.

When I'm deep awake, the moment is enough. And when I'm not, there is always this underlying feeling of dissatisfaction, even if things are going well. The Buddha called this dukkha . . . the suffering that never leaves us when we are lost in separateness. In my experience, this primal discontent only subsides when I'm immersed in the mystery of the moment. Then I can accept things just as they are, and I become content for no reason.

STUCK IN THE STORY

I'm having a bad day. The kids have been hyper, and Debbie is stressed out about work. Or maybe I'm the one who's hyper and stressed out about the new book I'm working on. I'm feeling decidedly stuck in the story of 'Tim', and it seems painfully hypocritical to write about waking up.

I've gone for a walk in the local cemetery, as I sometimes do when I want some peace. No one here is too noisy. And they're way past being stressed out. So I sit down on a bench and try to become conscious of the mystery of the moment. But I keep

going over the same worried thoughts in my head. This is getting me nowhere.

Time for a little trick to free up my attention and snap me out of my story, which I learned long ago in my 20s. If the mystery is too elusive for me to find today, I'll focus on something a lot more tangible.

I place my attention on the physical sensation of my breath entering and leaving my body.

My thoughts are still racing, but I continue to breathe slowly in and out. And as I do so, I feel my body start to relax.

Then as I fully enter the feeling of breathing, the quality of my breath becomes more sensual.

Just to breathe feels very good, and I'm pulled into the delicious richness of my sensations.

I am becoming one with my breath and in love with breathing.

Starved of my attention, my agitated thoughts begin to quiet down.

I feel clear and spacious . . . relaxed and alert.

I am conscious of the mystery of the moment.

I sit there for a while, quietly enjoying being and breathing, until I feel ready to engage with my everyday dramas again. And from the deep awake state, the challenges in the story of Tim now seem less daunting. In fact, I'm feeling positively inspired to go and work on the book, since all of this will be great material to use.

Then my eye catches the name on the gravestone in front of me. This guy was also named 'Timothy', and he died when he was about my age. He was once breathing like I am now. Then one day he stopped breathing and was gone. I wonder how many times he breathed in and out, between his first inhalation and last exhalation? And this makes me intensely conscious of how precious it is to be alive . . . and how important it is to appreciate each breath.

MEDITATION

I've been sleeping and I'm just coming around, sitting up in bed with my legs crossed, slouched against the wall behind me. I had intended to meditate on my breath, but I must have drifted off. I used to be a 'macho meditator' who gave himself a hard time when this happened. But I'm a chilled-out meditator now.

I even rather enjoy the nodding-off process. I watch with interest as I get sucked into my thoughts, which start to become dreams, and my head involuntarily drops forward as I fall unconscious. Then I wrench my attention out of the dream and deliberately become conscious, which feels like trying to pull my hand out of a jar of molasses.

At one time I would have called this a 'bad meditation'. But now I see it as a useful philosophical exercise because it strengthens up the psychological 'muscles' I need to stay awake during my everyday life. I'm aware that a comparable process is happening all the time. I'm getting sucked into the dream of Tim and then pulling back my attention to the mystery of the moment.

Focusing on the breath is a wake-up technique found in all spiritual traditions. But I try not to see it as a 'discipline', since that turns it from a pleasure into a chore. Like everything in life, it doesn't always work. For me, waking up is an adventure, and if it wasn't a challenge some of the time it wouldn't be much of an adventure. But I try not to set up the expectation that waking up must be some momentous struggle, because this just gets in the way of its happening naturally.

Anyway . . . the time has come to stop meditating . . . or should I say dozing? I've got things to do and I need to get out of bed. I'm feeling drowsy, so it takes me an effort to rise lethargically to my feet. But now that I'm standing, it's easy. I stay still for a while and think about this, as it's the same with becoming deep awake. Sometimes my story is so sticky that it takes an effort of will to free myself up. But when I'm deep awake and living lucidly, it's utterly effortless.

WHAT DON'T WE NOTICE?

Focusing on the sensation of breathing is a simple way to dive deeply into the mystery of the moment. Normally we're so unconscious that we don't even notice the mystery, even though it's actually utterly obvious. The next step on our journey of awakening is to recognize something else that we're normally too unconscious to notice . . . and that is our essential identity as the 'I' of awareness.

This is a sample of *How Long is Now?* by Tim Freke. To purchase the full book please go to -

http://timfreke.com/Books.aspx

OTHER BOOKS BY TIM FREKE

The Mystery Experience – A Revolutionary Approach to Spiritual Awakening

Lucid Living – A Book you can Read in an Hour that Will Turn Your Life Inside Out

The Jesus Mysteries – Was the 'Original' Jesus a Pagan God?

Jesus and the Lost Goddess – The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians

The Laughing Jesus – Religious Lies and Gnostic Wisdom

The Gospel of the Second Coming – Jesus is Back... and this Time He's Funny!

The Hermetica – The Lost Wisdom of the Pharaohs

Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching

The Heart of Islam

In the Light of Death – Spiritual Insight to Help You Live with Death and Bereavement

Zen Made Easy – An Introduction to the Basics of the Ancient Art of Zen

Rumi Wisdom – Daily Teachings from the Great Sufi Master

Zen Wisdom – Daily Teachings from the Zen Masters

Taoist Wisdom – Daily Teachings from the Taoist Sages

Heaven – A Guide to the Higher Realms

WAKING UP WITH T!M FREKE

When we experience the spiritually awakened state we find ourselves immersed in the breath-taking mystery of existence; there's an awe-inspiring oneness with the

universe and an ecstatic experience of limitless love; the sensual body comes alive and life becomes WOW!

If you'd like to experience this transformation of consciousness for yourself I can help. I have spent my life exploring world spirituality and I can guide you to a direct experience of the awakened state.

Tim Freke

Tim Freke present life-transforming retreats, experiential seminars and entertaining evenings of 'standup philosophy' throughout the world and online. To find out more visit www.timfreke.com