



THE  
MYSTERY EXPERIENCE

A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH  
TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

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THE STAND-UP PHILOSOPHER

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This book is dedicated  
to my daughter Aya

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# PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

## CHAPTER 1

# THE MYSTERY EXPERIENCE

*Welcome to this book. I want to invite you on a life-transforming journey of awakening. In this chapter I'm going to begin by introducing you to the 'mystery experience'.*



This is the mystery experience. It's happening now. Something wonderfully mysterious is going on. We're conscious of being alive, but we don't know what life is. How astonishing! We inhabit a vast universe, but we don't know what the universe is. How amazing! We're experiencing this moment, but we don't know what this moment is. How intriguing!

If I examine this moment I see that I'm experiencing a tapestry of shapes and colours that I call the 'world'. But what is the world? I'm experiencing thoughts and feelings arising in my mind. But where do they come from? I feel certain that I exist. But I don't know why I exist. How bewildering!

Life is so utterly mysterious it takes my breath away. Yet normally most of us go about our business as if being alive was nothing remarkable. We pretend we know what's going on, when really we don't. We act as if we understand what it is to be a human being, when actually it is an enormous enigma of mind-boggling proportions.

In this book I want to explore with you the 'mystery experience' that spontaneously arises when we become profoundly conscious of the mystery of life. You can taste the mystery experience by simply focusing your attention on the mystery. Then your state of consciousness will immediately start to change.

You'll become acutely aware that you exist and how amazing that is. You'll see the familiar world with curious eyes. Your mind will own up to how little it really understands reality. Your heart will start to race with the excitement of being alive. But this is a superficial taste of the mystery experience. The deeper we go into the mystery, the deeper the mystery experience becomes.

In this book we're going to make a journey into the depths of the mystery experience, because this leads to what is often called 'spiritual awakening'. When we spiritually awaken we find ourselves entering an altered state of consciousness that is hard to describe. But there's no missing how wonderful it *feels*.

Recently I dreamt I was standing on a stage about to talk to a large audience about the mystery experience, as I often do in my waking life during one of my stand-up philosophy shows. Before I started to talk I paused, because I couldn't find the words to express how amazing the experience is. Then suddenly I knew what to do, because I remembered that I could fly! So I simply said 'The mystery experience feels like this'... and I soared up into the air... dancing ecstatically in the emptiness of space... swooping up and down in effortless abandon.

I wish I could swoop and dive for you right now, to convey how

it feels to be awake to the mystery. But I haven't worked out how to fly in waking life. And this is a book so you wouldn't see me anyway. That means I'll have to describe the mystery experience in words for you as best I can. I'm going to give it a go!

When I dive deeply into the mystery experience it feels as if I'm dissolving in an ocean of love. There's an awe-inspiring sense of oneness with the universe. My sensual body comes alive. The search for meaning is resolved into a wordless 'understanding', which is so deep it must be felt not thought. There's the silent certainty that all is well; and such a feeling of relief... like coming home.

## **THE WOW OF AWAKENING**

I've been exploring the mystery experience ever since a spontaneous awakening when I was a 12-year-old boy. Over the decades I've had the privilege of being with many people when they've found themselves in the awakened state for the first time. And the most common thing that people say is simply 'WOW'.

In recent years I've been running mystery experience retreats in which I guide people directly to the awakened state. Afterwards I receive a large number of moving emails from participants. By far the most used word is 'WOW', which is usually in capital letters followed by a string of exclamation marks!!!

I like the word 'wow'. I think of the word as modern American slang, but my dictionary tells me it's a natural expression that originated in 16th-century Scotland. 'Wow' is a way of expressing astonishment and wonder. It's a great word to describe how it feels when we awaken, because the mystery experience is a very big WOW. It's better than the best surprise you've ever had.

There are many ways of being wowed. There's the aesthetic wow of listening to beautiful music. The scientific wow of understanding the grandeur of the universe. The wow of pleasure when eating gourmet food. The wow of sport when witnessing extraordinary physical skill. The wow of learning when you surprise yourself with your own competence.

This book is about the WOW of awakening. The deep WOW of appreciating the mystery of existence. The ecstatic WOW of realizing how amazing life is. The simple WOW of being alive. The inexpressible WOW of seeing what-is beyond words.

At the end of a mystery experience retreat I ran in Las Vegas, whilst we luxuriated together in the wonder of the WOW, people attempted to describe what they were experiencing in various ways.

Then a lovely woman called Kate said:

This is what everyone wants to feel.

I love this description of the awakened state, because it's so simple and so true. The mystery experience is the WOW that everyone is searching for. We all long to feel alive and when we awaken we feel totally alive. We all long for freedom and when we awaken we know that we're completely free. We all long for love and when we awaken we become immersed in limitless love.

I've spent my life exploring the world's spiritual traditions, because at their mystical heart they all offer us ways to awaken to the WOW. Spirituality is often misunderstood as a way of thinking about life, but first and foremost it's a guide to transforming consciousness and *experiencing* something beyond words.

Zen Master Daie put it perfectly, nearly a thousand years ago, when he wrote:

All the teachings the sages have expounded are no more than commentaries on the sudden cry... Ah, This!

So let me plagiarize old man Daie and say right now:

I'm no sage and all the ideas in this book are just commentaries on the joyous whoop... WOW! This is it!

I remember many years ago, at one of my very first weekend seminars, a young woman arrived dressed all in black and feeling very withdrawn. At the end, beaming and brimming with love, she announced: 'I feel like a convert to... *something*.' Yeah! That's it. I'm also a convert to... *something*. In this book I want to invite you to experience the WOW and become a convert to... *something*!

## **THE WAY OF WONDER**

The experience of awakening is notoriously hard to put into words. But actually all experiences are hard to describe, unless the person we're talking to is familiar with the experience we're talking about. Could we tell a blind person what it's like to see a sunset? Could we tell a deaf person what it's like to be moved by music?

You know what I mean when I say 'I feel angry', because you've also experienced anger. You know what I mean when I say 'I feel

happy', because you've also experienced happiness. Communication relies on shared experience. So I'm going to introduce you to the awakened state by focusing on an experience you're already familiar with.

I want to share with you a way of waking up to the WOW that begins with the simple experience of wonder. If you wonder deeply enough you'll start to awaken. You'll become conscious of the breathtaking mystery of existence and the mystery experience will spontaneously arise.

Our journey starts with wondering, which leads to the mystery, and at the heart of the mystery is the WOW. The Gnostic 'Gospel of Matthias' explains:

Wondering at the things that are before you is the first step to the deeper knowledge.

Zen Master Sengstan asserts:

It is because I wondered deeply that I attained a penetrating realization. If you do not reflect and examine your whole life will be buried away.

Being willing to wonder is a prerequisite for awakening because, in the face of the breathtaking mystery of life, if we don't feel curious we simply aren't very conscious. When being alive doesn't fill us with wonder we're already half-dead.

## **The Art of Wondering**

I'm a philosopher and this book is a celebration of philosophy as the art of wondering. Socrates, one of my philosophical heroes, tells us:

The feeling of wonder is the touchstone of the philosopher. Wonder is the only beginning of philosophy.

This is an old-school view of philosophy. These days philosophy tends to be seen as dry conceptual inquiry. I studied this modern form of philosophy at university many years ago. It was fascinating and great training for the mind. But ultimately I could see that I was becoming lost in a maze of words. I was much more interested in spiritual philosophy, which I found could lead me out of the maze of words to the mystery experience.

Spiritual philosophy doesn't seek to obscure the mystery with

ideas, but to reveal the mystery *through* ideas. It recognizes the obvious fact that concepts are no more than concepts, which can never contain the mystery. It doesn't propose ultimate answers, rather a new way of seeing that makes the experience of life even more wondrous.

The Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus is a spokesperson for this approach to philosophy when he declares:

The job of the philosopher is to awaken us to the vision.

I resonate deeply with this. For me the job of the philosopher is to help us wonder so deeply that we go beyond words to the WOW. And then the philosopher's 'um?' is transformed into the yogi's 'om'.

## **A WONDERFUL LIFE**

In this chapter I've been bigging up how good it feels to be immersed in the mystery experience, because I want to whet your appetite for the meal ahead. But it's important that you understand that the WOW is not just some passing peak experience or ultimately irrelevant high. Spiritual awakening affects how we think, feel and act. It gives rise to a new way of living our everyday lives.

Socrates famously declared:

The unexamined life is not worth living.

The modern philosopher Alphonso Lingis added:

The un-lived life is not worth examining.

Both are true. If we never dare to examine life we subsist in a semiconscious stupor. But life is only worth examining because this can help us to live more fully.

In this book I'm going to share with you a profound philosophical story about life, which can wake you up to the WOW *and* transform your experience of living. But I want you to remember that it's only a story. The mystery of existence can never be explained away. Life is always more than we think. As the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead explained:

Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when

philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains.

## FROM ME TO YOU

*In this chapter I want to introduce myself, so you can get a sense of where I'm coming from. I also want to prepare you for the variety of content in this book, which is going to include spiritual philosophy, scientific insights, criticisms of other ways of thinking, experiential exercises, and practical ways of transforming our everyday lives.*

I'm writing this book to share the mystery experience with you. A book is inevitably a one-way conversation, but I don't want this to be a lecture. I'd much prefer it to feel like a 'tête à tête' or better still a 'heart to heart'. I want to connect with you in the most authentic way I can, because when we're real with each other magic happens.

As I write this book I want to reach through the page to touch you. And, as you read this book, I want you to never forget that these are more than simply words on a page. As the American poet Walt Whitman says so directly in one of his poems:

Camerado, this is no book,  
Who touches this touches a man,  
(Is it night? are we here together alone?)  
It is I you hold and who holds you.

We're in different places in the web of space-time, but we're together here and now nevertheless. So let me tell you a bit about myself. I want to be up front about something important right from the start. Just because I'm a teacher of spiritual awakening, that doesn't mean I see myself as some sort of enlightened master. I'm simply a human being with a passion for the mystery experience.

During my life I've spent a great deal of time wondering, so I've inevitably become pretty good at it. If I wonder deeply it wakes me up to the WOW, so I've come to know the mystery experience well, which means I can guide others directly to it. What we focus on becomes our area of expertise. I've focused on spiritual awakening.

My journey of awakening hasn't led me to arrive at some 'fully realized' enlightened state. Indeed, these days I neither expect nor aspire to be enlightened. And that isn't an admission of spiritual failure, because I've come to feel the whole idea of special enlightened people is completely misconceived.

I've written more than 30 books on spiritual philosophy, but I still feel like a child taking my first teetering steps. How else could I feel in the face of the infinite mystery? I'm not claiming I have privileged knowledge of the way things are. I simply like to wonder. I wonder if it might be like this? I wonder if it would be helpful to approach things in this way? And this wondering keeps waking me up to the WOW.

But this doesn't mean my life is always perfect and I'm continually content. My life is full of highs and lows, just as I suspect your life is. I'm writing these words to connect with you, precisely because we share the same dilemmas of life. We're all in



the mystery of life together, and I want to offer to you what I've found of value, in gratitude for all that I've been given by others.

I'm not special in any way. At least I'm no more special than you or anyone else. I'm a family man in his early 50s, with all of the pressures and pleasures that come with being a responsible father and husband. I possess many admirable qualities, but I also have my faults... just ask my wife! If you met me, I hope you'd like me. But if you lived with me you'd eventually see another side, which you may not enjoy so much. And I have come to feel OK about that, because in my experience we're all capable of being both great souls and assholes. Right?

## **THE BIG QUESTION AND THE BIG ANSWER**

If you're intrigued to know about my personal journey of awakening, then check out my last book *How Long Is Now?*, which is full of anecdotes and stories. There's no time for all that now, because we've got a very big adventure ahead of us. But before we set off I feel it may be helpful to at least share with you how my personal journey began and where it has led me.

As a boy it seemed very strange to me that all the grown-ups were preoccupied with trivia and never seemed to mention how profoundly mysterious life is. Life seemed like one big question and I felt intuitively sure there must be a big answer. I would often sit quietly wondering about life, because I figured that if I could work out what life is, then I'd know what I should be doing with it.

My favourite place to wonder was on Summerhouse Hill overlooking my busy little home-town. This is where I sat and wondered with my lovely mongrel dog Scrag beside me. I know it sounds like a Disney movie, but life's like that sometimes!

One day while I was wondering on Summerhouse Hill, something magical happened. I became so consumed by wonder that my state of consciousness spontaneously transformed. I tasted the mystery experience for the first time and it was WOW!

It's a long time ago but I can still vividly recall the feeling of being immersed in overwhelming, exquisite, ecstatic love. It felt as if the whole universe was pulsating with limitless love. It felt as if I was dissolving into this love and becoming one with the universe. It felt as if the world had become a wonderland. It felt like I'd been given the most amazing surprise. And yet it also felt as if I'd remembered something I'd always secretly known.

I had no way of understanding what was happening to me, but I knew that I'd found the big answer to the big question of life. And

the answer was not a clever theory. It was a mysterious experience in which the big question dissolved into an ocean of love. This discovery changed my life.

Ever since that moment I've been exploring the mystery experience. I've continually experimented with ways to transform consciousness and to integrate the awakened state with my everyday life. But my spiritual journey hasn't brought me to a permanently awake state, as I once hoped and imagined it would. Something even more amazing has happened. I've become a lover of life.

## **A LOVE AFFAIR WITH LIFE**

My unexpected awakening as a boy was the beginning of a love affair with life that in many ways resembles any other love affair. When we first fall in love something special happens. It's what we've been waiting to feel all our lives. But that's only the start of the journey of love, which is full of endless delights and challenges.

At some point during a love affair we may realize something that changes everything. We know that we're not engaged in a temporary romance, because we're deeply in love. This magic moment could happen in the ecstasy of making love or when doing the washing up. It could be when things are going well or when things are falling apart. Whenever it happens our world is never the same again.

It's hard to say how we know we're deeply in love. We just do. And when we fall deeply in love, we become unconditionally committed to our love affair. We understand that loving involves much more than just feeling great together. It means remembering we still love each other, even when we can't stand each other. It's being there for each other through the good times and the bad.

My love affair with life has been very similar to this. When I dissolved into the mystery experience as a boy it was love at first sight. This was the beginning of a romance, full of exquisite moments that came and went, often leaving me feeling bereft and alone. At a certain point I realized something that changed everything. I'd fallen deeply in love with life, completely and unconditionally. I knew I was committed to our love affair through the good times and the bad, in sickness and health, in joy and sorrow.

The ancients imagined life as a great Goddess. Sometimes I see myself as a lover of the Goddess. And my love affair with her is both rewarding and challenging. It's a profoundly transformative adventure of getting to know each other in all our various states. It's a dance in which we become one yet remain two.

Sometimes we're so happy together it's perfect. Sometimes we argue and fall out. Sometimes we make love and nothing really matters but the mystery of the moment. Sometimes we need to get down to the practical business of being together in time. Sometimes I can't stop enthusing about how beautiful she is. Sometimes I badmouth her because she's not behaving as I want her to. Sometimes I trust her totally, despite her capricious ways. Sometimes I doubt her love and become demanding of her affection. But through it all I never stop finding her mysteriously beguiling. I never forget that I truly love her.

The WOW is like passionate sex or tender intimacy. Such special moments can't be forced. They just happen when we're both in the mood. These magical experiences set our affair on fire, but it's sustained by a quieter love that is always present; a love of simply being together.

This love of simply *being* sustains me through the ups and downs of my relationship with life. It allows me to love life, even when I don't like what's happening. It makes me feel committed to life for better and worse, so that I endure the storms and dance in the rain.

My exploration of the mystery experience has transformed my life into a love affair. And this has changed how I see the spiritual adventure. I no longer aspire to arrive at some permanent enlightenment, which seems forever out of reach. I aspire to become a lover worthy of life.

## **THE MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR**

In this book I'm going to share with you a revolutionary new approach to awakening that can lead you deep into the WOW, so that you can become a lover of life. In this introductory part of the book I want to prepare you for our journey. In Part I we'll set off to explore the deep mystery of life. In Part II our journey will lead us to the astonishing discovery of the deep self. In Part III we'll arrive at the wonderful experience of deep love, which is at the heart of the mystery experience. Then in Part IV we'll make our way back to our everyday lives to see the human adventure in a wonderful new way.

Many books start with simple ideas, but may gradually become more complex. However, the way of awakening takes us in the opposite direction. The first half of our journey will involve seeing life in a radically new way, and when we need to think in unfamiliar ways it can seem difficult at first. But we're heading towards an understanding of life that is extremely simple, so much of the second half of our journey will be plain sailing.

I don't want to say too much about the journey that lies ahead, because I want it to be a magical mystery tour. But I do want you to feel safe to make the journey with me. In my experience when we feel safe we open up, so that the naturalness of the awakened state becomes apparent.

*Every heart assured of safety opens instantly.* This is a realization I've arrived at after sharing the mystery experience with people for so many years. During my retreats I do all I can to make people feel safe, so that they can dare to dive into the mystery. I want everyone to relax and be themselves, so that waking up becomes an effortless delight. It's harder to do that in a book, but I'm going to give it a go.

We all approach life with our own unique collection of ideas that we've picked up along the way. How the ideas in this book harmonize or conflict with your own present view of life is crucial to how comfortable you'll feel on our journey together. So I want to take a moment to reassure you about some things.

First I want to assure you that, although we'll begin our journey focusing on the wonder of life, I fully acknowledge that life is often not very wonderful at all. If you're going through a tough patch in your life, which we all inevitably do, I want you to know that this book isn't just going to be some irritating rant about how great life is... coming from someone who is clearly having a better time of things than you are.

I want us to be real about how life is. To make the journey of awakening we need to be willing to enter those dark corners of life, where we feel sad and lost, angry and bitter, trapped and alone. If we can't go there, we won't be free.

If you're new to the possibility of awakening, I want to assure you that entering the depths of the WOW doesn't require you to be spiritually experienced. In fact this can be an advantage, because you won't be burdened with the baggage of too many preconceptions.

If you're a long-time spiritual seeker, then I hope you'll find the ideas in this book help you make sense of your experience of awakening in an exciting new way. But I want to warn you that I'm going to challenge some common spiritual ideas. I'll need to be critical sometimes in order to articulate a new approach to spirituality.

Perhaps you feel that you understand the teachings of awakening intellectually, but haven't had the experience of awakening? Many people who attend my mystery experience retreats find themselves in this predicament. An intellectual understanding of awakening is very helpful, but we need to go beyond our ideas to experience the

WOW.

I want to help you actually experience the WOW. So throughout this book I'm going to suggest some practical experiments that will lead you progressively deeper into the mystery experience. I encourage you to pause to do these experiments, because if you don't you may end up at the end of the book with just a pile of words.

Perhaps you're someone who's sceptical about awakening? You may fear you've embarked on a book full of mystical mumbo jumbo? If so... good for you! I like questioning people. In my opinion you can't be too sceptical, because if you become sceptical of everything you'll find your brain goes pop and you're dancing in the mystery.

A lot of spiritual books are full of irrational nonsense, so I completely understand why you may be sceptical about awakening. I want to assure you that I have great respect for rationality, which is simply the requirement that we have good reasons to adopt a particular way of seeing things. I'm a big fan of clear thinking. As long as the thoughts are interesting!

If you're coming from a scientific understanding of the world I want you to know that I'm fascinated by science. In our scientific age I feel it's imperative that we develop a form of spirituality that is compatible with the awesome discoveries of empirical science. So the relationship between spirituality and science is going to be one of the themes of this book.

If you're a *feeling* person I want to assure you that I am too. I may call myself a philosopher, but essentially for me the spiritual journey is about love. On our journey together there will be times when we need to traverse some tricky philosophical terrain, but this is only so we can travel deeper into the heart of life. We need to clarify the mind so that we can open the heart.

Wherever you are coming from I hope you find our journey together rewarding. The only real requirement is that you're willing to wonder about life... to be curious and open... to be an explorer. My dictionary tells me that the word 'explorer' means 'somebody who travels to places that were previously unknown or un navigated'. That's where we're going. This is a book for explorers. If that sounds like you, I'm glad you've made it to base camp, because we're about to set off on a grand adventure.

## CHAPTER 3

# A NEW LANGUAGE OF AWAKENING

*In this chapter I'm going to explore the new language I'll be using throughout this book, to help you understand spiritual awakening in a fresh way. Like an overture before an opera, which plays some of the major musical themes that will be developed later, I'm sharing these ideas with you now to give you a glimpse of where we're going. I'm not expecting you to get all that I'm saying straight away. I simply want to plant some seeds.*

Over the last four decades I've studied and written many books about the major spiritual traditions of the world. These different approaches to awakening have all influenced me profoundly, and I feel immense gratitude to those great spiritual explorers who've cleared a way for me through the bewilderment of life.

I love the simple naturalness of Taoism, the searing immediacy of Zen, the ecstatic devotion of Sufism, the philosophical depth of Advaita Vedanta, the expansive love of Christianity, the esoteric wisdom of Kabala, the magical earthiness of Shamanism. All these traditions and many others have touched me in different ways. But I've never seen myself as part of any particular spiritual tradition, because I've preferred to draw on all of the wisdom of the world.

In recent years I've been attempting to articulate a new philosophy of awakening. In my view spirituality, like everything else, needs to keep evolving if it is to stay alive. So I've felt inspired to create a new approach to spirituality, which has all the depth of the traditions I've studied, yet avoids some of the dead ends I've been down on my own journey of awakening.

To create this new way to the WOW I've developed a new language of awakening. The concepts we use matter, because the way we think conditions what we experience. The WOW is beyond words, but the words we use have a huge effect on how we approach the journey of awakening.

I've loved studying the spiritual traditions of the world and have immense respect for the wisdom they've bequeathed us as our heritage. But I've come to the conclusion that much of our traditional spiritual vocabulary is well past its sell-by date and starting to smell funny. So I've set out to develop new concepts that can help us explore a new way to the WOW. Lucid concepts that cast the perennial insights of spirituality in a fresh light. Living concepts that speak the language of today. Truthful concepts that authentically capture my own experience of the awakened state.

## **DIFFERENT WAYS OF SAYING 'WOW'!**

In this chapter I want to share with you some of this new language of awakening. I've already introduced you to my concepts of the 'mystery experience' and the 'WOW', which I hope are working for you. Now I want to introduce you to more concepts that I use to describe the awakened state. These concepts are like signposts that point to the wordless awakening from different directions. Read the signs and then look where they're pointing.

## **The Deep Mystery**

I find it helpful to imagine life as a great ocean. When I'm only conscious of the surface of life I seem to know what life is, which allows me to get on with my everyday existence. But when I reach below the surface of things, right down to the depths of life, I find myself immersed in the 'deep mystery'.

The deep mystery isn't a mystery that we could one day solve, such as 'is there life on Mars?' The deep mystery is the ultimate mystery of existence. The deep mystery is the primal mystery that the universe exists and we are here to think about it. It's the great mystery in which we live and breathe and have our being. And when we become conscious of the deep mystery... the mystery experience spontaneously arises.

## **Deep Awake**

When I bob along on the surface of things my experience of life is shallow. But when I plumb the mysterious depths my appreciation of what it is to be alive deepens. I become 'deep awake'... which is like being awake... only more so.

Normally we're only superficially awake, but when we become conscious of the deep mystery we become deep awake. In the spiritual literature this awakened state is sometimes described as 'enlightenment', because it's like being lit up from within.

I avoid the term 'enlightenment', however, because it's become associated with the idea of an ultimate spiritual goal, only achievable by special people who give up everything and live in caves. And this is very misleading, because the deep awake state can be experienced by anyone... even you and me.

## **Deep Knowing**

Paradoxically, when I'm deep awake and immersed in the deep mystery, I find myself *knowing* something. But this isn't 'knowing' in the normal sense in which I know certain information about the world. It's a much deeper knowing than that. So I call it 'deep knowing'.

In the Western spiritual tradition this 'deep knowing' is called 'gnosis'. Gnosis is directly knowing the essence of things. It's the big answer to the big question of life. But this answer is not in the form of a collection of words. It's an immediate realization, unmediated by concepts. It's like having the most profound thought you've ever had... only without the thought.

Deep knowing transforms my experience of living, because it



gives rise to a quiet confidence that, despite appearances, life is good. When I become deep awake, I have an unshakeable faith that fundamentally all is well. Even when things are rough on the surface, at the depths of life I experience a primal joy of being.

## **The Deep Self**

When I become deep awake I see that I am much more than the person I appear to be on the surface of life. There's a deeper level to my identity, which I call the 'deep self'. When I bob along on the surface of life I don't notice the deep self, but it's always there. It's a permanent presence, which is always present, witnessing the ever-changing dramas of my superficial self.

The superficial self is what I appear to be. I appear to be 'Tim'. But the deep self is what *I am*... my mysterious essence... my ineffable spirit... my naked *being*. And when I become conscious of my deepest *being* I discover I am one with all *beings*. I see that as separate individuals you and I are like different waves on one great ocean of being.

## **The Universe Vision**

When I'm conscious of the depths as well as the surface of life, I experience the 'universe vision'. The word 'universe' comes from *universus* meaning 'all together' or 'turned into one'. The universe vision is the profound recognition that essentially all is one.

This is not a bland experience of some monolithic 'oneness'. It's a profound experience of the 'uni-variety' of the universe. It's seeing that on the surface of life everything is separate, like waves on an ocean, but at the depths all is one.

When I experience the universe vision I find myself appreciating the multifarious variety of life as an expression of one mysterious essence. I understand that I am both separate and not separate from life. On the surface I appear to be a separate individual, but at the depths of my identity I am one with all that is.

## **Deep Love**

When I know I'm essentially one with all, there is a profound sense of connectedness to life that I experience as all-encompassing love. Christians call this love 'Agape' and Buddhists call it 'compassion'. I call it 'deep love' because it spontaneously arises when I deepknow the deep self. In my previous books I've also called it 'big love', because this love is so very big.

I like the word 'love' because it's a *feeling* word. And deep love

is an exquisite feeling that reaches right down into my body. It's the feeling that arises when I am conscious of *both* the surface separateness *and* the deep oneness.

Love is always an experience of communing as one through the separateness that divides us. When we love someone we share in their joy and suffering. We feel separate and not-separate from each other. We become conscious of the intimate depths of our connectedness. And that feels good.

In the same way, when I become conscious of the intimate depths of my connectedness to all of life, I find myself in love with life. When I know that I'm separate and not-separate from everything and everyone, I find myself in love with everything and everyone. And that feels very good indeed.

### **Sensual Aliveness**

Awakening is intensely pleasurable. This is an important fact that traditional spirituality is often strangely silent about. Indeed, many spiritual traditions disapprove of pleasure, which seems crazy given how great it feels. I'm a big fan of pleasure. But when I'm only superficially awake I only partially feel the enjoyment available to me, because I'm partly numb.

When I am deep awake, however, I find myself really savouring the pleasures of life. I'm astonished by all I see and hear and touch in this world of wonders. My body wakes up to how sweet it is to be alive. To simply breathe feels delicious. To sense my feet on the ground is an unspeakable delight. And I want to dance because life is WOW!

Awakening is not an experience of disembodied enlightenment. It's an experience of 'sensual aliveness'. When I'm deep awake there is a visceral love of being, which permeates this wonderful skin-bag of nerves, meat and bones I call my body. Hurray for the body! Everybody should have one!

### **Enlivenment**

Some spiritual traditions suggest that we awaken by retreating from life into passive equanimity and the absence of desire. But it's not like that for me. When I'm deep awake I enter a passionate state I call 'enlivenment', in which I feel intensely present and in love with the moment.

When I'm enlivened I'm filled with enthusiasm for life and I want to actively engage with the challenges before me. There's a spontaneous flow to my life that makes living magical. I'm inspired

and creative. I'm at my best. My mundane life seems marvellous. The familiar world becomes a wonderland.

## **A Lover of Life**

The WOW is an amazing experience, but it's much more than that. It leads to a new way of living as a 'lover of life'. I introduced you to this idea in the last chapter, and now I'd like to say more of what it means to be a lover of life, because it'll give you a better idea of where we're ultimately heading.

Being a lover of life doesn't mean always feeling that life's wonderful. It means loving life as it is. It means embracing both the good and bad of life. It means passionately enjoying and tenderly enduring the tumultuous adventure of life through which we learn how to love. Waking up to the WOW feels good, but it's not just a good feeling. To love deeply is sometimes to suffer deeply.

Last year my father died of a stroke. For the previous eight months he could move only one arm and he would lie in his bed plaintively muttering 'help me, help me'. It broke my heart because I love him. Being deep awake didn't stop me suffering and I didn't want it to. I wanted to suffer with my dad. I wanted to be right with him in the awfulness of the situation.

For me, awakening isn't about transcending suffering, as some spiritual traditions teach. Rather, awakening allows me to suffer willingly because of love. And then my heartbreak becomes poignant... meaningful... even beautiful. When I suffered with my dying dad there were precious moments of deep connection. The bitterness was also sweet. The deep pain plunged me down to the depths of life. It broke my heart and what poured out was a deeper love.

When I listen closely I hear the WOW of life expressing itself in many different tones of voice. There is the ecstatic WOW of joy and the subdued WOW of sadness. The intoxicating WOW of hope and the sobering WOW of disappointment. The warm WOW of intimacy and the piercing WOW of loss. The great song of life passes between the major and the minor modes... and I am stirred by both.

## **HAVE YOU BEEN WOWED?**

Perhaps there have been moments in your life when you tasted the WOW in some of the ways I've been describing? Most of us, at some time or other, have found ourselves suddenly seeing through the superficialities of life and diving into the mysterious depths.

This can happen when we embrace a newborn child... or listen to beautiful music... or enjoy a deep conversation. It can happen when we confront death... or feel defeated by failure... or wrestle with a mental breakdown. It can happen at any time. It can happen now.

## CHAPTER 4

# WONDERING

## - WOW Experiment -

*Our journey into the mystery experience is going to be an experiential adventure. So in this chapter I want you to taste the WOW for yourself by experimenting with 'wondering'. As the book progresses there will be more WOW experiments that will lead you deeper into the mystery experience.*

I've introduced you to the approach to awakening we're going to be exploring and the new language we're going to be using. Now I want to invite you to experiment with an easy way of allowing the deep awake state to spontaneously arise. This is the first step on our journey into the depths of the mystery experience and what I want you to do is extremely simple.

I want you to wonder and then to notice what happens to your state of consciousness.

I want you to experience a moment of wonder right now.

I want you to see things as they really are... utterly mysterious and miraculous.

### **A Moment of Wonder**

Shortly before he died of cancer the British playwright Dennis Potter did a moving interview, in which he shared the wonder that arises in the face of imminent death. Have a look at this and *get* what he is trying to tell us.

...at this season, the blossom is out in full now, there in the west early. It's a plum tree, it looks like apple blossom but it's white, and looking at it, instead of saying 'Oh that's nice blossom'... last week looking at it through the window when I'm writing, I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it.

Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and more important than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn't seem to matter.

But the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if people could see that, you know. There's no way of telling you; you have to experience it, but the glory of it, if you like, the comfort of it, the reassurance... not that I'm interested in reassuring people – buggar that. The fact is, if you see the present tense, boy do you see it! And boy can you celebrate it.

Life is WOW and Dennis Potter could see that as he was dying. But why wait until you're dying? Now is WOW if you open up to it.

Just take a moment to really wonder. As the American author Ray Bradbury says:

Stuff your eyes with wonder... live as if you'd drop dead in ten seconds. See the world. It's more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories.

## **THE WOW OF NOW**

Open yourself up to the wonder of life right now.

Be conscious of this moment with that deep part of you that appreciates music and art... that feels the beat and dances to its rhythm... that finds truth in poetry as well as theory.

Dive deeply into wonder and the world will start to sparkle.

There will be an experience of intense gratitude that arises when you see how glorious life really is.

There will be an experience of immense humility that arises when you see how impossible it is to comprehend such a mystery.

## **It Wonders Me...**

There's a great phrase used colloquially in some areas of Pennsylvania. They say 'it wonders me'. I really like that because life wonders me deeply. Wonder with me.

It wonders me that the world is so rich and vivid.

It wonders me that the universe is so vast, yet full of exquisite detail.

It wonders me that I am alive and experiencing this precious moment.

It wonders me that I can think and feel and sense and imagine.

It wonders me that you are you, yet I am me.

It wonders me how good it feels to simply be.

It wonders me that I could ever forget how much I love being.

Does it wonder you?

## The Miracle of Life

Take a look at this powerful poem by Walt Whitman, who's one of the great high priests of wonder. It's called 'Miracles' and is so full of wonder it points straight to the WOW. If you want to really *get* the vision Uncle Walt wants to share with you, read it aloud then look at the world through new eyes. Go on... as an experiment.

What shall I give? and which are my miracles?  
Realism is mine – my miracles – Take freely,  
Take without end – I offer them to you wherever your feet  
    can carry you or your eyes reach.  
Why! who makes much of a miracle?  
As to me, I know of nothing else but miracles,  
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,  
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,  
Or wade with naked feet along the beach, just in the edge of  
    the water,  
Or stand under trees in the woods,  
Or talk by day with any one I love – or sleep in the bed at  
    night with any one I love,  
Or sit at table at dinner with my mother,  
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,  
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive, of a summer  
    forenoon,  
Or animals feeding in the fields,  
Or birds – or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,  
Or the wonderfulness of the sun-down – or of stars shining  
    so quiet and bright,  
Or the exquisite, delicate, thin curve of the new moon in  
    spring;  
Or whether I go among those I like best, and that like me  
    best – mechanics, boatmen, farmers,  
Or among the savans – or to the soiree – or to the opera,  
Or stand a long while looking at the movements of  
    machinery,  
Or behold children at their sports,  
Or the admirable sight of the perfect old man, or the perfect  
    old woman,  
Or the sick in hospitals, or the dead carried to burial,  
Or my own eyes and figure in the glass;



These, with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,  
The whole referring – yet each distinct, and in its place.  
To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,  
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,  
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with  
the same,  
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same;  
Every spear of grass – the frames, limbs, organs, of men and  
women, and all that concerns them,  
All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles.  
To me the sea is a continual miracle;  
The fishes that swim – the rocks – the motion of the waves –  
the ships, with men in them,  
What stranger miracles are there?

## PARALOGICAL THINKING

*This book isn't just about wondering in the sense of being awed by life. It is also about wondering in the philosophical sense of exploring new insights into what it is to be alive.*

*This chapter is going to be more intellectually challenging than our previous introductory chapters, because I want to describe a new way of thinking that forms the foundation of my spiritual philosophy.*

**Tim:** I choose not to believe that.

## CELEBRATING SEPARATENESS

*We began this part of our journey by exploring the deep love that arises when we recognize we're both separate and not-separate from each other and all of life.*

*This has led me to articulate a paralogical approach to awakening that has its foundation in a deep knowing of the primal oneness, yet also delights in our exquisite individuality and natural humanity.*

*I've also been critical of an approach to awakening to oneness that doesn't value separateness, because if we reject separateness we reject love.*

*In this chapter I want to clearly state why I think separateness is both important and necessary. And I want to explore the paralogical relationship between oneness and separateness.*

An important Buddhist text called the Dhammapada begins:

With our thoughts we create the world.

I want to explore why I think this amazing idea is extremely insightful, because this will help us come to understand the importance of separateness. But let me start by clarifying the way I think it can also be misleading.

Clearly I'm not consciously thinking the world into existence right now. I can think intensely about there being an elephant in my office, but no elephant appears. I can imagine all sorts of things I'd like to exist, but reality resists my wishes. Tim isn't creating reality with his thoughts. However, what I'm experiencing of reality depends on how I conceptualize it.

Have a look around you and you'll see that everything you're conscious of you have a concept for. I am doing this now. I'm conscious of the computer screen... the office... the garden outside... the birdsong... the sky... my body... the table I'm working at... the time of day it is... the coffee I'm drinking. I'm conceptualizing everything I am conscious of.

My concepts divide up reality into 'this not that'. My coffee cup is 'this not that'. My computer keyboard is 'this not that'. The time of day is 'this not that'. I'm differentiating the world into comprehensible chunks, and this is defining what I'm experiencing.

Our ideas allow us to discriminate reality into a multiplicity of things. But we're also discriminating the world without using words. There are pre-linguistic concepts that babies and animals possess which enable them to negotiate the world in simple ways.

When you chew a piece of meat in your mouth you're making an instinctual discrimination between the meat that is your food and the meat that is your tongue. And if you don't, it hurts! (This is hard for me to imagine because I'm a life-long vegetarian, but it's such a good example I couldn't resist it.)

As we mature from children into adults we learn more and more concepts, which we use to divide up reality in ever more subtle ways. Through this process we steadily become more conscious of the world. As children we live in a small and simple world, but as adults we live in an enormous universe populated with an incredible diversity of separate things. And that's because we're using a huge number of concepts to discriminate reality into the world of separateness.

When we don't discriminate things we aren't conscious at all. This is the state of deep sleep. When we're awake we discriminate

ourselves from the world as the subject of a flow of experience. And we understand our experience by discriminating the world into individual things with different qualities.

## **Consciousness Is Discrimination**

So here's the big idea I want to share with you.

Consciousness is discrimination.

Consciousness arises as we discriminate the whole into separate parts.

The more we discriminate the world, the more conscious we become.

## **The Necessity of Separateness**

Now here's the realization I've been working towards.

It's discrimination which allows us to be conscious.

This means that the experience of separateness isn't a trivial illusion, because it's a prerequisite for us being conscious at all.

## **The Paradoxity of Awakening**

This leads us to an understanding of the paradoxity of awakening.

We are only conscious because we're experiencing the world of separateness.

But now we are conscious through experiencing separateness, we can *also* become conscious of the essential oneness of being.

If we get lost in our concepts we don't experience the primal oneness, but without these concepts we wouldn't be conscious at all.

So we come to know the wordless via words... which is exactly what we've been doing in this book.

## **CONSCIOUS ONENESS**

People often ask me ‘How can I be one with everything?’ I playfully advise them to go to sleep, because in the deep sleep state there is no separateness. In deep sleep we don’t discriminate reality, so there is only the oneness of unconscious being.

This is an unsatisfactory answer, of course, because my questioner is interested in spiritual awakening, not going unconscious. But I like to use this question as an opportunity to point out the importance of separateness. Let me take you through it:

In deep sleep we dissolve back into the primal oneness of awareness, so we become unconsciously one with all. But this isn’t the experience of spiritual awakening.

Spiritual awakening is being *consciously* one with all.

Our predicament is that consciousness arises with discrimination, so to be conscious is to experience separateness.

This means we can never *just* be conscious of oneness. We must become conscious of *both* separateness *and* oneness.

We must become conscious of the oneness of being *through* the separateness.

When this happens, we see the primal paradox at the heart of existence... all is one and one is all.

## **The Universe Vision**

When I’m conscious that everything is essentially one, I experience the ‘universe vision’. I use this new term to make it clear that this isn’t *just* an experience of oneness. It’s recognizing that the universe is a paradoxical ‘uni-variety’. When I experience the universe vision I see that reality is an essential oneness *and* an apparent multiplicity. I see that everything is separate *and* not-separate.

Many people choose to acknowledge only one of these perspectives and dismiss the other as unreal. Those who take a common-sense approach to life dismiss oneness as a mystical fantasy. Some spiritual traditions teach that oneness is real and multiplicity is an illusion. But I see no reason to prejudice oneness over multiplicity, or vice versa. They’re both wonderfully real from different paralogical perspectives.

When I experience the universe vision I see that oneness and separateness are opposites that coexist as complementaries. Reality

is a fundamental ‘both/and’ that we discriminate into ‘either/or’.

As Carl Jung put it:

No reality without polarity.

That’s it in a nutshell... and it rhymes. Nice one Carl.

## **THE ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY OF PARADOX**

I’d like to clarify the paralogical relationship between oneness and separateness by contemplating the powerfully pregnant opening lines from the Tao Te Ching’ by Lao Tzu. Let’s begin by reading the passage straight through, and then we’ll examine it line by line, because it has so much in it.

Tao is not something that can be pointed to.

Tao is not an idea that can be defined.

Tao is indefinable original totality.

Ideas create the appearance of separate things.

Always hidden, it is the mysterious essence.

Always manifest, it is the outer appearances.

Essence and appearances are the same.

Only ideas make them seem separate.

Mystified?

Tao is mystery.

This is the gateway to understanding.

### **What-Is Before Words**

Old man Lao’s first two lines explore a profound realization we’ve discussed a great deal in this book:

Tao is not something that can be pointed to.

Tao is not an idea that can be defined.

Tao is the mystery of being. It’s the essence of everything, so we can’t point to Tao as a separate thing. It is not a concept we can grasp with the mind. All our ideas about life are simply ideas. The



Mystified?

Tao is mystery.

This is the gateway to understanding.

The Tao is the deep mystery of life. To become conscious of the deep mystery we need to enter a profound state of not-knowing. This is the gateway to deep knowing what-is before words.

### **Seeing Through Your Ideas**

Later in the 'Tao Te Ching', after sharing with us a whole host of great ideas, Lao Tzu impatiently declares:

Enough ideas!

Ideas divide up the whole.

We are conscious through discrimination, but if we want to wake up to oneness we must pay attention to the what-is before words. Let's do it now.

Ask yourself... what is the world before you think about it?

Ask yourself... who are you when you have no idea who you are?

You won't be able to say what you see in words, because these questions can only be answered by a pre-conceptual deep knowing of being. This is what makes old man Lao say:

Those who speak do not know.

Those who know do not speak.

And that's somewhat ironic coming from someone with so much to say for himself !

## THE WEB OF LOVE

– WOW Experiment –

*I've been articulating a way of awakening to oneness that celebrates separateness... a way of coming to know the deep self that can allow us to embrace our human individuality... a way of deep-knowing the deep mystery that brings meaning to the adventure of life.*

*I've been suggesting that we are both separate and not separate. And that it's because we are two that we can commune as one in deep love. For me it's the deep love that really matters. So I want to end this part of the book with another WOW experiment that can help us expand our hearts to embrace everyone.*

As human culture evolves we're becoming more and more connected to each other. Recent research has shown that on average there are only six degrees of separation between any of us. Through a chain of friends of friends you are connected to each of the seven billion people living on the Earth right now. Each of us loves someone... who loves someone... who loves someone... creating a web of love that enfolds the world.

In our last WOW experiment we explored the practice of 'deep love meditation', which involved using the imagination to consciously extend our compassion to other people. In this WOW experiment I invite you to play with another form of 'deep love meditation'. This practice involves using the imagination to help you become conscious of the vast web of love to which we're all connected. Let's do it together. Take it slowly and enjoy.

Take some time to come into the deep awake state by wondering, entering and presencing.

Now be conscious of your connections of love with your family and friends.

Imagine the connections like magical threads reaching out from your heart to touch the hearts of those you love.

Now imagine magical threads of love connecting those people you love with those people that they love, who you may never have met.

Then imagine magical threads of love reaching out from these people to all those people they love.

Now imagine the web of loving connections expanding further and further, so that you are connected with each person on this beautiful blue planet.

Now let love pulse from your heart out along all the connections to encompass the Earth.

We are all one in love.

Through me writing this book and you reading it we have become intimately connected in the web of love.

I am sending out my love to you.

PART IV

# A JOURNEY INTO EVERYDAY LIFE

deep love I feel in the deep awake state impels me back into the story to compassionately engage with life... to care for others... to make the world a better place for future generations.

Becoming a lover of life means adopting a paralogical approach to awakening. It means becoming conscious of the deep self, so that we find ourselves 'loving being'. And it means expressing this love in the world by 'being loving'.

## **Know Yourself and Show Yourself**

For me the journey of awakening isn't just about transforming my state of consciousness, it's also about what I bring to life through the way I live. The 'enlightenment' ideal pictures the purpose of spirituality as 'self-realization'. I agree with this completely, because the journey of awakening leads us to become conscious of the deep self. But there's another complementary pole to the paradoxity of awakening.

Spiritual awakening is also about 'self-expression'. This means engaging with the process through which the separate self evolves, so that we can progressively express more of the infinite potential of our essential nature. It means entering into the creative process of life as a conscious collaborator with the primal field of awareness, to bring new possibilities into the world.

Self-realization and self-expression are complementary aspects of the adventure of awakening. Aspiring to become a lover of life means becoming conscious of *what we are* and bringing forth *what we can become*. It is loving ourselves as we are, and seeking to grow into a fuller expression of our potential.

Becoming a lover of life means reaching deep within so we can come further out. It means transcending the story so we can transform the story. It means daring to be a unique expression of the mystery of being, on a journey of self-realization and self-expression. It means both *knowing* ourselves and *showing* ourselves.

## **CAN WE BE ALWAYS AWAKE?**

Many spiritual traditions suggest that the goal of the journey of awakening is to permanently inhabit some sublime superconscious state. But it seems to me that this is simply not possible. The nature of consciousness is to constantly change. No two moments are ever the same. Consciousness is flux.

The idea that we could be permanently awake flies in the face of our actual experience. Every day we all go through a cycle in which

consciousness dissolves back into to the primal ground of deep sleep and arises again refreshed. No one is permanently awake. Surely that's obvious?!

Consciousness is like a wave that rises and falls. Sometimes we're extremely energized and more conscious, other times we're tired and less conscious. The process of awakening doesn't lead to a permanently awake state, because it's the nature of consciousness to come and go. The primal ground of being is always present, but our experience of it must change.

So what I am suggesting is this. We currently move between the sleeping, dreaming and waking states. Spirituality can help us add to this cycle the more conscious deep awake state. As we arise from sleeping into waking we can expand consciousness further to become deep awake. Then we can surf the wave of consciousness as it rises and falls from deep sleep to deep awake.

If we make it our goal to be permanently awake we will inevitably fail. If we blame that failure on our spiritual immaturity or the evil ego we will feel increasingly bad about ourselves. Rather than coming to love ourselves as we are, we'll constantly confirm our deepest fear... that we aren't good enough.

Embracing the spiritual ideal of becoming a 'lover of life' doesn't mean aspiring to the impossible goal of being always awake. It means loving our experience of life as it actually is. It means accepting that consciousness inevitably rises and falls, because that's inherent in the paralogical nature of life. It means understanding that we must experience being *less* conscious to experience being *more* conscious.

## **An Evolutionary Journey**

One of the revolutionary insights of science is that life is evolving. The universe is an ongoing creative process, through which the infinite potential of being is progressively actualizing. Each one of us is an evolving fragment of the cosmos.

The concept of evolution has become central to our understanding of existence. Yet many forms of spirituality are rooted in the distant past before this understanding had arisen. This means we need to update our spiritual ideas so that we conceive of awakening as a perpetual process of evolution, rather than an end-driven dash for ultimate salvation.

I want to suggest that the purpose of the spiritual journey is not to arrive anywhere, but rather to engage with the adventure of life in a new way, so that the evolutionary process unfolds powerfully within us. It's about waking up to our deeper *being* so that we can

more fully engage with the evolutionary adventure of *becoming* a more conscious individual. It's about living our lives as a transformational process through which we are learning to love.

This is not a linear process in which we steadily become more awake. It's a paralogical process, which entails finding ourselves and losing ourselves... wonderful insight and deep confusion... great elation and harrowing suffering. The spiritual challenge is to willingly enter into this transformative process.

The paralogical twist we've been exploring in this book is that to make the most of the human adventure, we need to awaken to the deep self. When we feel the 'safe vulnerability' that arises in the deep awake state, we can courageously engage with the tumultuous story of life. When we're immersed in the mystery experience, we can relish the human experience and become a lover of life.

### **Travelling and Arriving**

The spiritual journey is an evolutionary process. There are stages of realization that we can reach, but there's no final destination, because there's always further to go. My journey was initiated by the realization that it's possible to experience the deep awake state, which changed my life forever. At some point I realized that my deep self transcends Tim and essentially I am not a person in time. At a certain juncture I realized that at the depths there is no separateness and all is one.

These realizations, and many others, have been stages on my journey of awakening. But the evolutionary adventure shows no sign of running out of steam. Each new level of understanding I arrive at leads inexorably to the next challenge. Life is always a paralogical dance of *both* arriving *and* travelling.

The most important realization for me, which was there right at the start and has remained with me throughout my journey, is that what really matters is love. It's this realization that has freed me from the desire to arrive at some final spiritual destination and led me to embrace the ever-changing challenges of my life as opportunities to continually grow in love. It's this realization that has led me to adopt the spiritual ideal of becoming a 'lover of life'.

### **The Inconstant Lover**

Many people seem to think that the journey of awakening is ultimately about achieving some sort of spiritual perfection. But I want to suggest that to be human is necessarily to be imperfect. We all have our flaws and foibles... even the best of us. Everyone who

of self-realization and self-expression.

Being a lover of life means embracing your flawed humanity. It means accepting that you will stumble on the journey of life... that you become wise by being foolish... that you can't always be awake and at your best.

Being a lover of life means welcoming the challenges of life through which you grow as a person. It means seeing life as a mysterious adventure, in which each summit you ascend reveals a whole new range of possibilities to master.

Being a lover of life means being open to the present moment as a precious opportunity to experience the richness of life and feel its transformational power. It means loving your life as it is and working for a better future.

## **THE DEEP PURPOSE OF LIFE**

In this book we've been exploring a story about the mystery of existence that brings meaning and purpose to life. Of course trying to definitively state the purpose of life is as futile as trying to tame the wind. Life is always more than words can say. Yet we need a compass with which to travel through life. And this story can give us a guiding principle to help us navigate the journey.

According to this story, the primal field of unconscious awareness is 'dreaming' itself to be many conscious individuals, through which it is coming to know itself and love itself. So, from this perspective, by becoming a lover of life on a journey of self-realization and self-expression we are playing our part in fulfilling the great purpose of life itself.

The scientific story points to this deep purpose of life. It tells how the evolutionary process has filled the world with ever more conscious forms of life, until it has created human beings. What makes us so special is that we're not just conscious, *we're conscious that we're conscious*. We know that we exist. We are conscious of *being*. And if we focus our attention on our deepest being we become deep awake. And then we can live as a lover of life.

Life is an evolutionary process, so the purpose of life is not to arrive but to make the journey. The only arriving is death and that is a destination we'd prefer to remain in the future. And even this destination, I suspect, is a transition into a new way of travelling. The purpose of life is never fulfilled, because the purpose is the process.