

Tim Freke talks about his new book HOW LONG IS NOW?

1. Why do you call yourself a ‘standup philosopher’?

Being a ‘philosopher’ can sound a bit dry and I wanted to make philosophy fun and sexy. 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, because changing the way we *think* transforms how we *feel* about life.

2. In your new book you talk about being ‘deep awake’ ... what do you mean?

Throughout my life I have found that it’s possible to experience an ultra-conscious 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. When we’re deep awake 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 life.

3. You describe your life as a ‘journey of awakening’ ... when did it begin?

I had my first spontaneous ‘deep awake’ experience when I was twelve years old, sitting on a hill overlooking my small hometown, whilst musing on the big questions of life. It was intensely beautiful and from that day I was on a quest to understand what had happened to me, so that I could find a way back to the experience. I’d embarked on a journey of awakening, which is still continuing today. 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. And, since my teens, I’ve found that when I become ‘deep awake’ so do others around me, because state of consciousness are catching. That’s why I now can help others to also experience this ultra-conscious state.

4. What do you mean when you say that ‘the mystery is a doorway to the deep awake state’

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 a profound experience of the mystery of existence. And ever since, I’ve found that when I focus my attention on how mysterious life is, my state of consciousness changes and I start to wake up. So that’s why I say 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 is actually utterly obvious. We think we know what is going on when we really don’t. But if we become conscious of the fundamental mystery of existence ... something amazing starts to happen. We begin to become deep awake.

5. How did becoming a parent change your spiritual journey?

A lot of traditional spirituality has a world rejecting flavour to it. It’s about waking up from the ‘illusion’ of separateness, rejecting the personal ‘ego’, not being attached to the people in our lives. After all the Buddha abandoned his family to become a celibate monk and Jesus is said to have told his disciples to leave their families and follow him. For many years I had a tendency to go along with this attitude without questioning it. I almost became a monk on two occasions. But now I am so glad I didn’t, because becoming a father has been the most profound experience of my life. And once I experienced the incredible love I have for my family I knew there was something seriously wrong with world-rejecting spirituality, and I knew I had to find a new approach to spiritual awakening which was about *both* exploring the deep awake state *and* really engaging with my everyday personal life. It’s this philosophy that I share in my new book. That’s why I playfully call it a ‘journey to enlightenment ... and beyond’.

6. You talk very enthusiastically about the experience of ‘big love’ that arises when you are deep awake ... why is love so important to you?

Throughout my adventures, love has always been the most important thing in my life. It was the all-embracing ‘big love’ I felt as a boy during my first ‘deep awake’ experience that made me begin my journey of awakening. It was the personal affection I felt as a father that led me to embrace my personal life, rather than reject the world by becoming a monk. It is the unconditional compassion I feel everyday that makes me want to help create a ‘deep awake’, world, full of conscious, kind individuals. For me, it’s love that makes life worth living. Only love fills the hole in my soul.

7. You say that when you are 'deep awake' you experience 'living lucidly'... what does that mean?

The deep awake state is similar to lucid dreaming, only it's happening while we're awake. So I call it 'lucid living'. 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. This is the perennial message at the heart of all spiritual traditions, and it is something we can know for ourselves if we carefully examine our experience of the present moment.

8. You say that when we live lucidly we start to experience the 'real world' of meaning, miracles and magic... sounds great ... please say more.

When we dream lucidly, we can influence what happens in our dream. People often ask me if, in the same way, when we live lucidly we can affect what happens in the dream of life. And my answer is 'yes'. I've found that the more lucid I am, the more the line between my inner world and the outer world becomes blurred. I no longer experience them as separate, and my fantasies become reality. My intentions shape the way the dream of life unfolds. This is what the ancients called 'magic.' In the past I've been reticent to talk about this much because I don't want to become associated with the superficial wishful-thinking that gets passed off as spirituality these days. As a philosopher, I pride myself on being sceptical, but I can't deny that on many occasions my intentions have miraculously manifested as realities, and this has driven me to explore how and why this happens.

9. If life is a dream what happens when we die?

I was asked exactly this question by a gentleman at a seminar a few years ago. I replied, 'Have you ever died in a dream?' The gentleman answered, 'Actually, I have.' So I said, 'What happened?' He said, 'I woke up.' Then he added, 'I think I may have answered my own question,' which made everybody laugh. The interesting question then, of course, is '*who* wakes up when we die?'

10. One last thing ... how long *is* now?

I love this question because it messes with my melon. If I look at it one way, 'now' is an instant so short I can't measure it. It's gone before I've had time to register it. But if I look at it another way, it's always now. Now is forever. The present is timeless. So now is *both* too brief to grasp *and* so constant that it has no beginning or end. That's an example of what I call the 'polarity paradox' that underlies all of life. Understanding this is the secret to being deep awake and living lucidly .. and it's to help people understand this and experience being deep awake for themselves that I've written my new book.