

# Wake Up to the WOW!..

Life is so utterly mysterious it takes my breath away,' says the Stand-Up Philosopher, rubbing his palms together with exuberant astonishment.

Standing before a large fireplace at the Abbey House in Glastonbury, he's casually dressed in an open-necked shirt and jeans, his eyes twinkling through trademark funky glasses.

'We're living on a giant rock hurtling through space in a universe of proportions we can't even begin to imagine,' he marvels. 'Yet most of us go about our daily lives as if nothing remarkable is happening. We each create a story to make sense of our lives, but no one knows what this is.'

'Most of the time we are so immersed in our story that we don't even notice we're in the mother of all mysteries. It's so mysterious! But if you become profoundly conscious of how mysterious life is, you can wake up to the wonder and that's when spiritual awakening happens.'

I'm at the opening of Tim Freke's 'Mystery Experience' weekend retreat. I've hosted the maverick Stand-Up Philosopher for numerous events at the Isbourne Holistic Centre in Cheltenham in recent years, and of the 100 or so guest speakers who've presented there – many counted

**'Stand-Up Philosopher'  
Tim Freke's revolutionary  
approach to spiritual  
awakening has yielded  
a new book and retreat,  
The Mystery Experience,  
designed to wake you up  
to the wonder of life.  
Will Gethin dives into  
The Mystery**

among the world's leading spiritual luminaries – for me Tim ranks among the best, for his ability to convey the complex territory of spiritual awakening in an accessible and highly entertaining way.

And yet when Tim last visited the Isbourne in May, he seemed to have broken through to a new dimension. His new book, *The Mystery Experience*, he announced, was the culmination of all his other 30 books – his Magnus Opus – the point at which all his ideas borne from 40

years' intensive study of spirituality had found their ultimate clarity.

So what's standing in the way of people waking up?' he asked. 'I propose it's spirituality itself – we're too rooted in the past and superstition, we need a new approach to shake things up. Spirituality needs to be linked to science and more applicable to modern daily living and relationships. Monks living in caves gave us our spirituality and it's marked by that.'

And as Tim proceeded to introduce 'The Mystery Experience' and his impassioned invitation to wake up to the wonder of life – what he called 'The Wow' – I was hooked. His newfound expression felt bold, intelligible and radically refreshing. Later reading Tim's riveting new book, my understanding of waking up to Oneness' considerably shifted. I felt called to do this retreat in the hope of moving from an intellectual understanding to an experimental taste of 'The Wow'.

I'm also hoping for a taste of the 'love connection' said to be at the heart of The Mystery Experience. And yet looking around the room, I don't sense much affinity with my fellow 30–40 spiritual explorers and deduce I'm unlikely to forge many meaningful bonds. How wrong I will be proved – by the end of the weekend I will love everyone!

## Waking from a Dream

Tim first entered the mystery experience at the age of 12, while sitting on a hilltop. He elucidates:

'I entered a state that I now call 'Deep Awake'. I had a profound sense of waking from a dream. The grass was greener, the birds singing clearly. Everything was utterly beautiful, yet I hadn't noticed. Everything was *onething*. Tim was part of the *onething*. I was filled with an overwhelming sense of love. The whole universe was pulsating with love. I felt a sense of total relief, it was a coming home.'

Something changed that day – Tim thought he'd found the answer but he hadn't, and so began an extraordinary quest, exploring drugs and altered states, gurus and awakening techniques. And the world's many mystical traditions.

'It's everywhere, this knowing, I discovered,' he says – 'what I've come to call 'Deep Awake' is called Gnosis in the West, Gnana in the East, and various terms worldwide. We don't notice it because we're so engrossed in our own story, yet it's the most obvious thing. This retreat is a chance to move into that natural state together.'

## Paralogical Thinking

To guide others to this state, Tim has developed a new way of understanding reality he calls 'paralogical thinking', which unites science and spirituality. Paralogical thinking is based on the premise that a paradox is not a problem to be solved, for all opposites are also complimentary, like Taoism's yin and yang symbol. It honours Carl Jung's notion of '*both and*' thinking, as opposed to logical '*either or*' thinking.

Tim uses the example of light to demonstrate life's profoundly paralogical nature: 'Light illuminates but can't be seen. The great physicist Neils Bohr declared light was both waves and particles, depending on how you look at it. My hand which you see before me is there, and yet science has shown us that it's not there at the same time. And I've found that at the depths of life, both are true. Yet on the surface, life is what it seems. As Neils Bohr said, the opposite of a superficial truth is false. And the opposite of a deep truth is true. The yin and the yang coexist, it's "*both and*". When you really get that, your consciousness changes.'

Tim's paralogical approach has expanded my understanding of the principle of 'Oneness' at the core of so many spiritual traditions. Numerous spiritual paths, like Advaita from India,

recognise the 'Deep Self' – unified existence – as our true nature, independent of our false identification with our egoic, 'separate' self.

And yet looked at paralogically, Tim says we're actually both separate beings living out our stories, and unified existence, which he calls 'awareness'. The Deep Self is the 'I' of awareness which watches your thoughts during meditation. At the depths of life, it's who we truly are.

'Step out of your story and you realise it's '*both and*' simultaneously,' he explains. 'You can keep your story, but pay attention

*“If you become profoundly conscious of how mysterious life is, you can wake up to the wonder and that’s when spiritual awakening happens”*

to the opposite pole. Our own nature is a paradoxity, two opposites that co-exist. Object and subject. Notice the other pole. 'What 'I' is it that experiences this?'

To illustrate this, Tim quotes the Gnostic gospel where Jesus says, 'I reveal what can't be seen'. And the Upanishads: 'What is it that can't be seen, that makes seeing possible?'

'Both point to the nature of the "I",' he says, 'that which can't be seen is 'awareness'. It has no forms because it's conscious of all the forms. All things you can observe are objects, but awareness itself is the subject. We experience life through form, but we are the awareness which is witnessing forms.'

So at the depths of life we're the Deep Self, united as Oneness, and on the surface, like waves on the ocean, we're individual entities. Tim says when you really get this, you can wake up to 'Big Love' – the unconditional love of being at the heart of all spiritual traditions.

'Love is how Oneness feels,' he says. 'When you see that you're separate and non-separate from everyone and everything, you experience Big Love, just by recognising the way it already is.'

## Big Love

This retreat aims to provide the necessary conditions for Big Love to occur, and Tim has devised a series of exercises to provide an experiential taste.

For the first exercise, we sit in pairs and try to connect as both separate individuals and as the 'Oneness of Awareness'. Putting on some exquisite piano music, Tim instructs us to close our eyes and enter

the present moment. 'Listen to the music and enter the sensation of your breathing. And then be the opposite – the space in which breathing and music is arising. Then opening your eyes, connect

with awareness in your partner. Allow the Oneness of Awareness a chance to connect with Oneness of Awareness and be two in one at the same time.'

Sitting on a chair before a stranger, I'm conscious of the music arising within my spacious awareness as I try to merge with the silence between the piano notes. And

as music arises within my awareness, I feel a deep sense of knowing, a surge of emotion. I shudder... recognition of my Deep Self, I wonder? It felt like a taste.

But beholding the stranger, I struggle to see beyond the separateness and connect with Oneness.

'I hated that,' shares one girl afterwards. 'I felt so self-conscious, it's all my stuff.'

Yet others really got it. 'I felt we lost separate forms and became one being, there were no boundaries between us, we had merged,' mused one participant.

In other 'I to I' connecting exercises, exploring the senses of 'listening' and 'touch', I don't seem to go any deeper, but many report powerful experiences.

"I felt connected and in love," reports one happy lady, following the touch exercise.

Saturday night brings the grand highlight of the weekend, a 'Big Love' gathering designed to create the optimum environment for the Deep Awake state to happen.

'It's one of the sweetest things I know,' says Tim. 'Don't think about it, step into it. We can connect with the part of us that wants to be conscious and authentic. It's an opportunity to glimpse who we are. We have a longing for deep love, it's why we're really here.'

'As a teenager I was filled with arrogance. What is the most important thing I can do? I wondered. Become enlightened, I decided. But now I don't think the concept of arriving somewhere is helpful. I no longer aspire to be a realised human being, but to be a lover of life. Not always to like what is happening, but to love simply being even when life pisses me off.'

## Connection

Arriving in the hall for the Big Love massif, the room is beautifully lit with soft coloured lights, gentle music emanates and rose petals are scattered across the floor. Sitting in two circles facing each other, we're to connect with the person in front of us, and every few minutes, those in the inner circle move places so we get to commune with lots of different people.

'Connect with the person in front of you with your eyes and with your fingertips if you choose to,' Tim says. 'Connect with each person as separate and non-separate beings. Let go into it and feel the connectedness that underlies separateness. Come to know yourself and show yourself. Come to celebrate that you are alive.'

Connecting with one beautiful soul after another, I tenderly hold hands, press my palm on beating hearts, and finger dance with those who want to make the connection. Sometimes it's awkward, sometimes flowing, sometimes wonderfully open-hearted, sharing beaming, loving smiles.

A woman looks self-conscious; I sense a fear of being seen.

A fierce-faced man embraces the moment, tenderly finger-dancing, relaxed and connected.

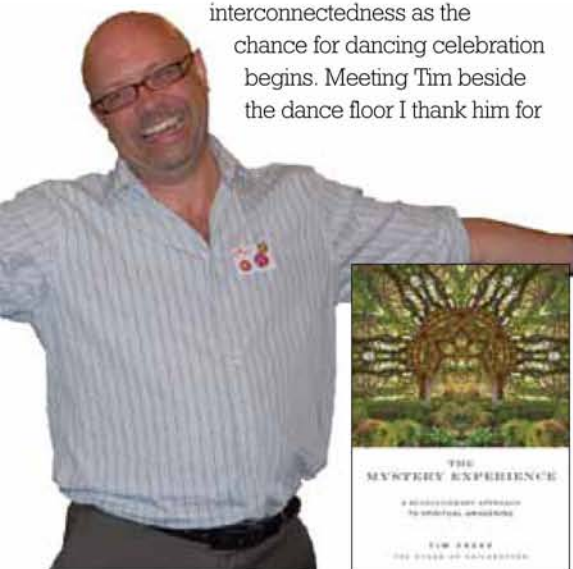
A man squeezes my hands, his eyes laughing with deep love.

A woman smiles in wonder and I feel a merging beyond the separate.

A man smiles in ecstasy, I sense he's meeting my Deeper Self.

I lose myself in the eyes of a woman, melting into her frank fragility and basking in a loving union of souls.

Emerging from the Big Love circle, there's a joyful vibe of interconnectedness as the chance for dancing celebration begins. Meeting Tim beside the dance floor I thank him for



The Mystery Experience group, Glastonbury

this deeply enchanting communion.

'All I want to do is bring people to the love,' he beams. 'It's taken me a long time to get to this point but I'm so glad I have.'

Rounding up the retreat the next day, Tim gives some tips for maintaining connection to the Deep Awake state, including simple meditation techniques. And he explains that staying connected to it brings a sense of safety to life, a feeling that at the depths all is well. So when life rolls with its usual up and downs and continuing challenges, you can calmly surf the waves.

He says it's the knocks in life, the wounds, that give us compassion. 'Our evolution is to care more deeply for each other,' he says. 'People can get lost in separateness because they are wounded. The thing to help us live with life as it is, is Deep Love – and from this place, we can take our compassion into the world.'

## Life Mission

Catching up with Tim at the end of the retreat, I ask him about his mission in life.

'My mission is to bring deep spirituality into mainstream culture,' he says. 'I want to share The Mystery Experience as a simple way of awakening that speaks to both the head and heart with as many people as I can.'

## Find out more

The next UK-based Mystery Experience retreats take place in Glastonbury, 29–31 March 2013 and 31 July–4 August 2013 (Summer Holiday 5-Day Retreat).

For further information about Tim Freke and The Mystery Experience, visit [www.themysteryexperience.com](http://www.themysteryexperience.com)

With all the hype surrounding 21.12.12, I ask if he thinks we're now entering anything resembling a new golden age of peace, love and harmony?

'I hope so. But 'entering' this period could be a long and difficult process. The important thing is to keep becoming more conscious and bringing love to life.'

And what would it take for this to happen?

'For things to change collectively it will take a large number of individuals to wake up to our essential oneness and bring Deep Love into the world. It's not going to happen to us. It is going to happen through us.'

I come away from the weekend feeling inspired, feeling love, enjoying the unfolding adventure of life, my expanded understanding of Oneness and deeper connectedness to other humans.

While I don't feel I fully entered the Deep Awake state, I definitely felt a deep love connection.

Following the retreat, the group emails start to flood in, so many of the group powerfully affected by The Mystery Experience.

'I can honestly say I haven't met such a great bunch of people who became special friends in such a short time,' says Oliver, a Property Developer from London.

And I fully concur with Oliver – arriving at the retreat, I had superficially looked about thinking I wouldn't forge many meaningful connections and yet by the end I felt immense love for everyone. We humans – whatever race, creed or colour – are all deeply connected, and The Mystery Experience weekend powerfully demonstrated this. I identified with everyone on an interconnected level that transcended separate egos and felt wonderfully nourishing.