

Waking Up to Life!

The Art and Skill of Awakened Attention

A Guide for Awakening to the Power, Presence and Passion of the Living Moment

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Foreword

**If the book we are reading does not wake us,
as with a fist hammering on our skull,
why then do we read it?
A book must be an ice-axe
to break the seas frozen inside our soul.
~ Franz Kafka**

Regarding the Tone and Purpose of this Book

It may be safe to assume that if you were attracted to a book with a title and cover such as this, you are also curious about such things as growth, healing, spirituality, self-awareness, happiness, the human predicament and other such topics you may find on the shelves of the self-help or philosophy sections of bookstores.

Perhaps you are looking for something, something yet unnamed; an answer or a solution of some sort. Maybe you are seeking peace or contentment. Perhaps you are suffering and looking for some advice, relief, or a cure. It could be that you have a feeling inside, a feeling that says 'there must be something more to Life.' A feeling of lack or emptiness; a sense of dissatisfaction or yearning, a deep hunger or sorrow, or some invisible attraction or drive. Or perhaps you have a burning curiosity that takes the form of questions such as, who am I, why am I suffering, and what is really REAL?

The book you are holding is the book I've always wanted to read, having had all of the experiences listed above. As I've moved through my explorations in the past fifteen years, the books I've read have been a source of direction, insight, entertainment and at times, (dare I say?) comfort.

With that in mind, I'm sure it won't take long for you to realize there is a dark and harsh tone to the first half of

this book. I've read enough self-help books to know that I can't write a strictly feel good book. No, this book is not for everyone. If you are looking for self-esteem, a confidence boost, new beliefs, solutions to problems, or ways to get happy, this book is not for you. Conversely, if you have moved past the beginner stages of Life unsatisfied with the answers you've found, still curious with a desire to explore Life in a deep, meaningful and courageous way, this book has a lot to offer.

If this book finds its target audience, it will expose many explorers to the ideas and teachers who have made the biggest difference in my Life. Why should that matter? It matters, because my life has been dedicated to trying to understand what I am and how things work. I have had to sift through mountains of garbage to get to the gold. This book is full of gold.

Due to the breadth of topics covered here, I do little more than introduce a perspective and then move on, leaving some of the connections between topics tenuous. That is as it should be. Like the site map of a website, this book was intended to provide a large map of the important terrain, leaving the details to the explorer. The further you get from the site map, the further you get from the essentials, with each main topic or link, leading to a bottomless pit of sub pages. As such, this book represents the site map for the website of my life, thus far.

At the risk of taking this metaphor too far, many people are lost on sub pages far removed from the essentials, completely unaware of a few fundamental tools and perspectives that could make the difference between a life of understanding and a life of utter delusion, illusion and confusion.

This book is a distillation, a condensed compilation of what I have discovered to be some of the very best perspectives, practices and approaches to a deep and

genuine modern Life exploration, free of dogma, new age fluff, useless filler and non-saturated fat.

The message of the greatest teachings often seems to become transmuted from the roar of the fire of liberation into something more closely resembling the soothing burble of a California Hot Tub

~ Hal Blacker, Editor of *What is Enlightenment*



Introduction

I have many different memories of waking up throughout my Life, as I'm sure we all do. I remember as a child waking up on fresh sunny mornings, between grades on summer holidays, filled with optimism, nothing to do and a world to explore.

I remember waking up to Saturday morning cartoons, blanket forts, and whole loaves of PB and J. I remember my Dad waking me up at 4:30 on frozen winter mornings to go to hockey practice. I remember the confusion and humor of waking up in gardens, backseats and strange rooms.

I can recall the joy of waking up next to new lovers, my youngest stepson, numerous cats and all alone. I have been awaked by strangers, psychiatric patients, sudden leg jerks and bad dreams, with water and candy, kicks and kisses, songs and screams.

I have a very strong memory of a hockey game when I was fifteen years old. I had mistakenly invited my new girlfriend to the game and I remember being acutely aware of her presence. I was divided, distracted and horribly self conscious although I was a very good player. I couldn't get away from my knowledge that she was there and the game seemed like it was happening without me. I was lost in a performance of one, for one.

Suddenly, as if from the bowels of hell, a voice sliced through my hazy fantasy world. A sword made of just two words, **WWWAKE UP!!!**, cut through my daydream and brought me back from my dream world. My Dad had roared.

I heard it and never forgot. It wasn't just the words, but also the tone, intensity and simplicity of the wake up call that shocked me to attention. It came in a moment when it was glaringly obvious that I had been asleep and his words

starkly highlighted the obviousness of that fact for me and everyone to see. I awoke instantly, aware that I had been lost in a personal dream world and had caused my team to suffer.

I know I've repeated that 'Wake Up!' yell many times since then, often times loudly, sometimes playfully, occasionally ferociously. I have fallen strangely in love with the whole notion of waking up, what that means and how it happens.

Waking up, as I will describe in the pages that follow, is not all sunlight and smiles. When you shine your attention on your experience in the present moment, you may not like everything you find. To wake up to Life, you must open to the darkness as well as the light, the pain as well as the pleasure and to death as well as to Life.

Waking up and becoming aware of having pee'd the bed may at first seem to suck, but it's far better than continuing to sleep in it! Or to put it less offensively, waking up may seem painful, but to sleep through the pain, we must also sleep through our pleasure; and if we sleep through our suffering, we must remain asleep for our joy. You don't get to pick and choose.

This Life passes us by once and I wonder how many people end up on their deathbed, realizing much like Rip Van Winkle, Life has slipped away while they were asleep.

The Birth of a Vision

I was a Psychiatric Nurse leading a workshop in an Alberta hospital and the topic was, *How to Live a Meaningful Life*. The class was familiar with my own tale of travel from darkness to light. I had been there, and from my own explorations and studies I knew that having a deeply meaningful Life can make you less vulnerable to depression, stagnancy, addiction and a variety of other

Life draining maladies. So it was with the goal of creating a meaningful Life that I came to formulate a simple exercise that led to my basic vision of Life, outlined in the pages of this book.

The simple exercise goes like this:

Fill in the blank ten times for each statement.

1. How do you see yourself? I am _____.
2. How do you see Life? Life is _____.

After enough time to record their twenty answers on paper, everyone was allowed to share all or some of their answers aloud. What we found was surprising: most answers that were shared were cliché, unimaginative and lacking any vision or depth. The answers I was receiving showed me that these miraculously gritty human beings had reduced themselves to tiny fragments, broken vessels, wounded souls, sick and sorry.

My answers to the above fill in the blank exercise and their refinement over the past three years informs Part 2 of this book and guides my vision of Life. Part 1 comes from fifteen years of solitary explorations, relational explorations, countless retreats and workshops I have attended, as well as the hundreds of workshops I have offered and thousands of clients I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity of working with. I hope something good comes of it for you, as it has for me.

A Few Important Definitions

What does it mean to wake up in the sense we will be looking at throughout this book? Below I have outlined three distinct meanings of the phrase waking up. Each type of waking up can occur independently through the use of appropriate disciplines that can facilitate waking up accordingly. These various disciplines also make up a large part of this book.

1. First, waking up can point to a gradual process of becoming progressively more aware, alert and attentive. The phrase wake up, when suggested to someone who is not in bed asleep, points to the possibility of becoming more aware, more alert and more attentive to the reality of their situation, in that moment. The words are inviting one to look more closely at what they are doing, or how they are behaving. The words are saying, although your eyes are open, you are not aware. You are lost in the activities of the mind, inattentive, not in touch with your present situation, and not in touch with your options to make a wise decision or act in a skillful way.

2. A second use of the words waking up, points to the possibility of waking up instantly and embodying a completely transformed way of seeing and being. The deepest philosophical traditions have thoroughly explored and documented this transformed way of seeing and being. Waking up in this way is often said to be the summum bonum or 'ultimate good' of Life, the pinnacle of human achievement and the omega point of evolution. Waking up here refers to the possibility of an event in which an individual suddenly realizes the truth of what they really are, beyond an individual.

Terms such as enlightenment, awakening, satori, kensho and self-realization, point to the ever present possibility of a radically new, yet timelessly old, way of seeing and being. This is the goal of Life according to ancient traditions, the very reason for our existence.

The following quote by Stephen Bachelor is a brilliant summary of these two forms of waking up, one to describe a gradual process, and one to describe a sudden event:

**...practice has two objectives:
to let go of our self-centered craving so that our lives
become gradually more awake; and to be receptive to the
sudden eruption of awakening into our lives at any
moment. Awakening is both a linear process of
freedom that is cultivated over time and an
ever-present possibility of freedom.
~ *Stephen Bachelor***

3. A third usage of the term, waking up, means to actualize your deepest potentials as a unique individual. Here you might train yourself utilizing a variety of disciplines meant to engage the personal (body, mind, heart) interpersonal (relationships, work, community) and spiritual (essence), thereby actualizing or waking up your uniquely deep potentials that often lie dormant and asleep.

The first two uses of the term, waking up, defined above, are most commonly used in Eastern approaches to inner exploration via contemplation, meditation or what is commonly referred to as spiritual work. The third use of the term, waking up, as I have defined, is more prevalent in the West with its approaches to personal development, growth and healing via psychology and a spirituality that attempts to foster highly developed morals and virtues.

Loose Research

Over the last few years, as a playful form of loose research, I have posed a question to countless people, young and old: Would you know what I meant if I asked you to wake up?

Almost without exception, the answer they provided showed an obvious understanding. That is not the interesting part though. The interesting part was in the observable change that came over each one of them while offering their answer. Their eyes became focused making contact with mine, their speech slowed and with great certainty, they proceeded to share their understanding of waking up, using both words and demonstration.

I have come to see what I think is a universal intuitive understanding of what it means to be asleep in the metaphorical sense that we are using here. I have also come to see that in order to explain your own understanding of what it means to be asleep, you must be awake.

This might remind you of a clichéd moment you may have observed in the movies or on TV, In the middle of the night, one partner taps or elbows the other partner whispering "Pssst... you awake? with the newly awakened partner responding, 'well I am now!' The question, are you awake, demands you be awake to answer it.

Pssst...
You Awake?

Three Lives?

Eckhart Tolle, in his excellent offering entitled, *The Power of Now*, makes a clear and simple distinction between your life and your life situation.

Your life is the duration of experience of being alive between the birth and death of your body/mind. Your life situation includes the circumstances and details that you

live your life within, such as job, family and friends, finances, home etc. Your life and your life situation can be looked at as separate, yet interwoven aspects of the totality of your Life.

You can lose everything in your life situation, while still having all of your life, but not vice versa. You can be in prison after losing everyone and everything and be just as alive as you would be sitting on the beach in Mexico sipping Margaritas.

I would now like to make a further distinction by recognizing Life in its totality, beyond your life or your life situation.

Life is The One Life of which you are an expression. Life is independent of you. Life is not personal. Life will go on without you, but as long as you are alive, there is a connection between your life and the One Life that created you.

Your life situation.
Your life.
Life.

