

# *Spirituality & Community*

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## **The Theogony of Hesiod Ancient Greek Cosmology**

**The Spiral Dance**  
Catriona MacGregor

**Waking From Sleep**  
Steve Taylor

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# Who We Are

[www.spiritualityandcommunity.com](http://www.spiritualityandcommunity.com)

***Welcome!*** Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

## A New Age of Light

***Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.*** We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

***We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light.*** We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



## What We Do

*Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas.* We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

# The Theogony of Hesiod

(excerpts)

## Ancient Greek Cosmology

Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (1914)



**The Ruins of the Temple of Zeus**

The Theogony is a poem written by Hesiod circa 700 BC. It describes the ancient Greek cosmology, including the birth of the immortal gods. The work relates that the world began with a void of chaos, which gave rise to Gaia (Earth). After a chain of events, Gaia mated with Uranus (Heaven), giving birth to twelve Titans, including Cronos. Uranus disliked his children and forced Gaia to hide them away. Cronos eventually castrated Uranus and became king of the cosmos. Cronos married Rhea, one of the twelve Titans. Rhea bore Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Zeus. Fearing that one of his children would overthrow him, Cronos swallowed each of his children after birth. However, Rhea hid Zeus in a cave, giving Cronos a stone to swallow instead. Zeus and the other children of Rhea, which were vomited up by Cronos, waged war on the Titans. Eventually, Zeus and his allies were victorious, and the Titans were cast into Tartarus. Zeus became king of the cosmos. For more, see:

[www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm).

(Il. 104-115) Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are for ever, those that were born of Earth and starry Heaven and gloomy Night and them that briny Sea did rear. Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be, and rivers, and the boundless sea with its raging swell, and the gleaming stars, and the wide heaven above, and the gods who were born of them, givers of good things, and how they divided their wealth, and how they shared their honours amongst them, and also how at the first they took many-folded Olympus. These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be.

(Il. 116-138) Verily at the first Chaos came to be, but next wide-bosomed Earth, the ever-sure foundations of all the deathless ones who hold the peaks of snowy Olympus, and dim Tartarus in the depth of the wide-pathed Earth, and Eros (Love), fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them. From Chaos came forth Erebus and black Night; but of Night were born Aether and Day, whom she conceived and bare from union in love with Erebus. And Earth first bare starry Heaven, equal to herself, to cover her on every side, and to be an ever-sure abiding-place for the blessed gods. And she brought forth long Hills, graceful haunts of the goddess-Nymphs who dwell amongst the glens of the hills. She bare also the fruitless deep with his raging swell, Pontus, without sweet union of love. But afterwards she lay with Heaven and bare deep-swirling Oceanus, Coeus and Crius and Hyperion and Iapetus, Theia and Rhea, Themis and Mnemosyne

and gold-crowned Phoebe and lovely Tethys. After them was born Cronos the wily, youngest and most terrible of her children, and he hated his lusty sire.

(ll. 139-146) And again, she bare the Cyclopes, overbearing in spirit, Brontes, and Steropes and stubborn-hearted Arges, who gave Zeus the thunder and made the thunderbolt: in all else they were like the gods, but one eye only was set in the midst of their fore-heads. And they were surnamed Cyclopes (Orb-eyed) because one orb'd eye was set in their foreheads. Strength and might and craft were in their works.

(ll. 147-163) And again, three other sons were born of Earth and Heaven, great and doughty beyond telling, Cottus and Briareos and Gyes, presumptuous children. From their shoulders sprang an hundred arms, not to be approached, and each had fifty heads upon his shoulders on their strong limbs, and irresistible was the stubborn strength that was in their great forms. For of all the children that were born of Earth and Heaven, these were the most terrible, and they were hated by their own father from the first.

And he used to hide them all away in a secret place of Earth so soon as each was born, and would not suffer them to come up into the light: and Heaven rejoiced in his evil doing. But vast Earth groaned within, being straitened, and she made the element of grey flint and shaped a great sickle, and told her plan to her dear sons. And she spoke, cheering them, while she was vexed in her dear heart:

(ll. 164-166) 'My children, gotten of a sinful father, if you will obey me, we should punish the vile outrage of your father; for he first thought of doing shameful things.'

(ll. 167-169) So she said; but fear seized them all, and none of them uttered a word. But great Cronos the wily took courage and answered his dear mother:

(ll. 170-172) 'Mother, I will undertake to do this deed, for I reverence not our father of evil name, for he first thought of doing shameful things.'

(ll. 173-175) So he said: and vast Earth rejoiced greatly in spirit, and set and hid him in an ambush, and put in his hands a jagged sickle, and revealed to him the whole plot.

(ll. 176-206) And Heaven came, bringing on night and longing for love, and he lay about Earth spreading himself full upon her.

Then the son from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him.

...

(ll. 453-491) But Rhea was subject in love to Cronos and bare splendid children, Hestia, Demeter, and gold-shod Hera and strong Hades, pitiless in heart, who dwells under the earth, and the loud-crashing Earth-Shaker, and wise Zeus, father of gods and men, by whose thunder the

wide earth is shaken. These great Cronos swallowed as each came forth from the womb to his mother's knees with this intent, that no other of the proud sons of Heaven should hold the kingly office amongst the deathless gods. For he learned from Earth and starry Heaven that he was destined to be overcome by his own son, strong though he was, through the contriving of great Zeus. Therefore he kept no blind outlook, but watched and swallowed down his children: and unceasing grief seized Rhea. But when she was about to bear Zeus, the father of gods and men, then she besought her own dear parents, Earth and starry Heaven, to devise some plan with her that the birth of her dear child might be concealed, and that retribution might overtake great, crafty Cronos for his own father and also for the children whom he had swallowed down. And they readily heard and obeyed their dear daughter, and told her all that was destined to happen touching Cronos the king and his stout-hearted son. So they sent her to Lyctus, to the rich land of Crete, when she was ready to bear great Zeus, the youngest of her children. Him did vast Earth receive from Rhea in wide Crete to nourish and to bring up. Thither came Earth carrying him swiftly through the black night to Lyctus first, and took him in her arms and hid him in a remote cave beneath the secret places of the holy earth on thick-wooded Mount Aegaeum; but to the mightily ruling son of Heaven, the earlier king of the gods, she gave a great stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Then he took it in his hands and thrust it down into his belly: wretch! he knew not in his heart that in place of the stone his son was left behind, unconquered and untroubled, and that he was soon to overcome him by force and might and drive him from his honours, himself to reign over the deathless gods.

(ll. 492-506) After that, the strength and glorious limbs of the prince increased quickly, and as the years rolled on, great Cronos the wily was beguiled by the deep suggestions of Earth, and brought up again his offspring, vanquished by the arts and might of his own son, and he vomited up first the stone which he had swallowed last. And Zeus set it fast in the wide-pathed earth at goodly Pytho under the glens of Parnassus, to be a sign thenceforth and a marvel to mortal men. And he set free from their deadly bonds the brothers of his father, sons of Heaven whom his father in his foolishness had bound. And they remembered to be grateful to him for his kindness, and gave him thunder and the glowing thunderbolt and lightning: for before that, huge Earth had hidden these. In them he trusts and rules over mortals and immortals.

...

(ll. 617-643) But when first their father was vexed in his heart with Obriareus and Cottus and Gyes, he bound them in cruel bonds, because he was jealous of their exceeding manhood and comeliness and great size: and he made them live beneath the wide-pathed earth, where they were afflicted, being set to dwell under the ground, at the end of the earth, at its great borders, in bitter anguish for a long time and with great grief at heart. But the son of Cronos and the other deathless gods whom rich-haired Rhea bare from union with Cronos, brought them up again to the light at Earth's advising. For she herself recounted all things to the gods fully, how that with these they would gain victory and a glorious cause to vaunt themselves. For the Titan gods and as many as sprang from Cronos had long been fighting together in stubborn war with heart-grieving toil, the lordly Titans from high Othyrs, but the gods, givers of good, whom rich-haired Rhea bare in union with Cronos, from Olympus. So they, with bitter wrath, were fighting continually with one another at that time for ten full years, and the hard strife had no close or end for either side, and the issue of the war hung evenly balanced. But when he had provided those

three with all things fitting, nectar and ambrosia which the gods themselves eat, and when their proud spirit revived within them all after they had fed on nectar and delicious ambrosia, then it was that the father of men and gods spoke amongst them:

(Il. 644-653) `Hear me, bright children of Earth and Heaven, that I may say what my heart within me bids. A long while now have we, who are sprung from Cronos and the Titan gods, fought with each other every day to get victory and to prevail. But do you show your great might and unconquerable strength, and face the Titans in bitter strife; for remember our friendly kindness, and from what sufferings you are come back to the light from your cruel bondage under misty gloom through our counsels.'

(Il. 654-663) So he said. And blameless Cottus answered him again: `Divine one, you speak that which we know well: nay, even of ourselves we know that your wisdom and understanding is exceeding, and that you became a defender of the deathless ones from chill doom. And through your devising we are come back again from the murky gloom and from our merciless bonds, enjoying what we looked not for, O lord, son of Cronos. And so now with fixed purpose and deliberate counsel we will aid your power in dreadful strife and will fight against the Titans in hard battle.'

(Il. 664-686) So he said: and the gods, givers of good things, applauded when they heard his word, and their spirit longed for war even more than before, and they all, both male and female, stirred up hated battle that day, the Titan gods, and all that were born of Cronos together with those dread, mighty ones of overwhelming strength whom Zeus brought up to the light from Erebus beneath the earth. An hundred arms sprang from the shoulders of all alike, and each had fifty heads growing upon his shoulders upon stout limbs. These, then, stood against the Titans in grim strife, holding huge rocks in their strong hands. And on the other part the Titans eagerly strengthened their ranks, and both sides at one time showed the work of their hands and their might. The boundless sea rang terribly around, and the earth crashed loudly: wide Heaven was shaken and groaned, and high Olympus reeled from its foundation under the charge of the undying gods, and a heavy quaking reached dim Tartarus and the deep sound of their feet in the fearful onset and of their hard missiles. So, then, they launched their grievous shafts upon one another, and the cry of both armies as they shouted reached to starry heaven; and they met together with a great battle-cry.

(Il. 687-712) Then Zeus no longer held back his might; but straight his heart was filled with fury and he showed forth all his strength. From Heaven and from Olympus he came forthwith, hurling his lightning: the bold flew thick and fast from his strong hand together with thunder and lightning, whirling an awesome flame. The life-giving earth crashed around in burning, and the vast wood crackled loud with fire all about. All the land seethed, and Ocean's streams and the unfruitful sea. The hot vapour lapped round the earthborn Titans: flame unspeakable rose to the bright upper air: the flashing glare of the thunder- stone and lightning blinded their eyes for all that there were strong. Astounding heat seized Chaos: and to see with eyes and to hear the sound with ears it seemed even as if Earth and wide Heaven above came together; for such a mighty crash would have arisen if Earth were being hurled to ruin, and Heaven from on high were hurling her down; so great a crash was there while the gods were meeting together in strife. Also the winds brought rumbling earthquake and duststorm, thunder and lightning and the lurid

thunderbolt, which are the shafts of great Zeus, and carried the clangour and the wacry into the midst of the two hosts. An horrible uproar of terrible strife arose: mighty deeds were shown and the battle inclined. But until then, they kept at one another and fought continually in cruel war.

(Il. 713-735) And amongst the foremost Cottus and Briareos and Gyes insatiate for war raised fierce fighting: three hundred rocks, one upon another, they launched from their strong hands and overshadowed the Titans with their missiles, and buried them beneath the wide-pathed earth, and bound them in bitter chains when they had conquered them by their strength for all their great spirit, as far beneath the earth to Tartarus. For a brazen anvil falling down from heaven nine nights and days would reach the earth upon the tenth: and again, a brazen anvil falling from earth nine nights and days would reach Tartarus upon the tenth. Round it runs a fence of bronze, and night spreads in triple line all about it like a neck-circlet, while above grow the roots of the earth and unfruitful sea. There by the counsel of Zeus who drives the clouds the Titan gods are hidden under misty gloom, in a dank place where are the ends of the huge earth. And they may not go out; for Poseidon fixed gates of bronze upon it, and a wall runs all round it on every side. There Gyes and Cottus and great-souled Obriareus live, trusty warders of Zeus who holds the aegis.

# The Spiral Dance

(excerpt from **Partnering with Nature**)

Catriona MacGregor

*If you would understand the Invisible, look carefully at the Visible.*

-Talmud

One sunny June morning, more than a decade after my experience with the sacred tree, I stood on a high ridge overlooking four rounded hills covered with golden grasses. The bright hillsides were dotted with groves of coastal live oak, coyote brush, and California bay trees. The gentle wind, filled with the delicate freshness of the Pacific Ocean twenty miles away, cooled the back of my neck. A small flock of western bluebirds flitted above the tips of the golden grasses. As I watched them land on the ground in a small, sociable grouping amongst red fescue grasses, a brilliant shimmer of silver caught my eye. Looking up, I saw an osprey about three hundred feet above my head. With its long, tapered wings and gleaming body, it looked like a cross suspended in the sky. Held securely in its strong talons was a newly caught fish. The brilliant silver flashes were the reflection of the sun's rays on the fish's gleaming, still-wet scales.

The alive fish was moving its tail back and forth as if swimming. It was held aloft with its valiant head forward, its eyes staring into the great innocence of the sky. For an instant, I felt pity for the fish; however, the osprey did not carry the fish off in a straight line to its nest, but flew in a slow-moving spiral of expanding circles. It gave the fish a majestic ride over the green and gold hillsides, over the doe and her two spotted fawns, over the long-eared hare standing up on restless hind legs, and over the wonderstruck woman and her dog.

In that moment, the osprey's act seemed no less grand than if I was witnessing first hand the discovery of the Holy Grail. The "sacred vessel", now held aloft so triumphantly, shone its brilliant silvery light into my soul. My consciousness was instantly lifted beyond the everyday to a vision of a grander sphere. My spirit soared with the osprey and the fish and my perception shifted, as I now saw what the fish saw—the body of the Earth revealed. Such a marvel so far beyond the fish's oceanic dreams, and so far beyond my own experience, that I, like the fish, entered a previously unimaginable place. On that morning, the Creator and master alchemist transformed me, as I witnessed that spiral flight.

The osprey continued to circle around for over twenty minutes while I stood entranced on the ridge below. During this time, the image and meaning of the spiral was integrated into every cell of my body. As I made my way home, the impression of the spiral stayed embedded in my mind. It seemed that everything I looked at—each blade of grass, each tree branch, and even the trees very trunks—rose up from the ground as joyous spirals moving before my very eyes. I felt the dynamic motion of the spiral move as a gentle yet powerful force upon the earth. It was as if I had seen the wizard behind the curtain, the magic that gracefully weaves itself through all existence...

The spiral is one of the most powerful and beautiful patterns in nature. Spirals are everywhere, from luminous spiral galaxies ablaze in dazzling colors to the tiny spirals at the tips of our fingers. The spiral is simultaneously a structure and a movement. As a dynamic movement, the spiral can be creative beyond measure, or devastatingly destructive, as exhibited by tornados or tsunamis. As structure or design, Spirals are the form that animate and inanimate things take. The fact that the spiral form is found throughout the great diversity of life and beyond, speaks strongly of an underlying unity in the universe, that is shared among all creation...

It is the spiral that connects us to every other life form on Earth. Of course, the blueprint for all life on Earth exists in a spiral! Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which contains the genetic instructions needed to create the components for cells, proteins, and RNA molecules of life forms are shaped as a spiral. ..Within the spiral exist the deepest secrets of Creation. ..

The predominance of the spiral in the physical world is echoed in the invisible, energetic, and spiritual worlds. ..Since the spiral is the intrinsic pattern of creation from which all things grow and evolve, spirals are frequently displayed in ancient drawings, sculptures, and other works of art found around the world. The spiral is often found at many sacred places around the world. For example, the spiral is a favorite sacred symbol of the Maori in New Zealand; it is also found in sacred uses in Africa and its form is carved into the ancient rocks at New Grange, Ireland. ...

The spiral itself is infinite which links it to the Creator, who is also infinite, and yet, the spiral is also found throughout the Universe in all “limited” life forms. Thus the spiral, in effect, is capable of going from the physical realm of the material world to the world of spirit and ultimately the birthplace of all creation. Thus, the spiral unites us with all life, with the Creator and ultimately within our deepest selves. ...When we attune ourselves to this subtle dance of creation, we enter a sacred realm—we find our own Holy Grail.

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Catriona has been a voice for animals and wild places all her life. She leads Vision Quests and Nature Quests to help people connect to nature and their own unique path in life. Her latest book is **Partnering with Nature**. The work is a simple book with a powerful message that illuminates the fact that our connection to nature, animals, and the earth is a vital part of our existence. This book speaks to anyone who senses a void in their life, and to anyone who wishes to make a difference in transforming our environment. She is also the coauthor of **Healing the Heart of the World: Harnessing the Power of Intention to Change Your Life and the Planet**, along with Carolyn Myss, Jean Shinoda Bolen, Masaru Emoto, Fritjof Capra, Thich Nhat Hanh, et al.

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# **Waking From Sleep:**

## **Awakening Experiences and a Permanent State of Wakefulness**

Steve Taylor

One evening last summer, when I was on holiday with my family in Wales, I decided to explore some of the farmland around our rented bungalow. I climbed over a gate I hadn't noticed before because it was hidden by long grass, and found myself looking down at a valley, with farmers' fields sloping as far as I could see and hundreds of sheep dotted over the hills.

After I'd been walking for a few minutes, looking at the fields and the sky, there was a shift in my vision, as if someone had pressed a switch. Everything around me became intensely real. The fields and the bushes and trees and the clouds seemed to be powerfully *there*, even to have their own kind of identity, almost as if they were sentient beings instead of just inanimate objects. I also felt a sense of unity with my surroundings. As I looked up at the sky, I could sense that somehow that the space which fills it was the same 'space' which fills my own being. What was inside me, as my own consciousness, was also 'out there'. In some sense I felt that the universe was inside me, and that I was it.

This is an example of what I call an 'awakening experience.' In awakening experiences, the world becomes more real and beautiful, and an atmosphere of harmony seems to fill our surroundings. We feel serene and whole inside, and our normal problems and worries seem to fade into insignificance. The world seems like a benevolent and meaningful place, and we feel part of everything around us, with an intense empathic connection with other people.

At a higher intensity of awakening, we might become aware of a kind of spirit or force pervading our surroundings, a radiant energy which seems to underlie the whole world and to make everything one. Our own identity may seem to dissolve away, as we become part of this oneness.

Awakening experiences happen when the 'filters' which limit our normal awareness of the world fade away. We 'wake up' to a wider and fuller reality, and in comparison our normal vision seems incomplete and even unreal. We feel that now we're seeing the world as it really is, as if we're seeing it in three dimensions rather than two, or in colour rather than in black and white.

### **The Triggers of Awakening Experiences**

Awakening experiences can sometimes occur for no apparent reason, but mostly they are generated by certain activities or situations. As a part of the research for my book *Waking From Sleep*, I collected over 100 examples of awakening experiences from friends, students and strangers. I found that two of the most common triggers of them were nature and meditation. Many people I spoke to had awakening experiences while they were walking in the countryside, swimming in lakes, or gazing at beautiful flowers or sunsets. Other people had them while they were meditating, reaching a state of pure consciousness, outside of time and space. Others had awakening experiences after meditating, when the perceptions were sharper and richer and they felt a sense of connection to their surroundings.

Two other common triggers of awakening experiences are dancing and listening to music. For example, one friend told me about an experience he had while he was dancing in a group outdoors:

As we were dancing I started to feel as if it wasn't me who was doing it anymore. I didn't have to think. It was just dancing me, and it was the best I ever danced. I felt like I was just a channel for the music. We weren't individuals anymore, we were a whole body of six people. I felt an expansion of awareness into space. I was dancing in the space in the middle of the hills. I was part of this vast background.

While another friend described an experience he had while listening to a concert performance of Brahms' 4<sup>th</sup> symphony:

The magical moment came and suddenly it was like glittering petals of sounds exploded. I could immediately feel the stream of life flowing around me. It was a movement of feeling as though I was experiencing heaven on earth. I felt] a huge sense of euphoria, an intense sense of well-being. Life became idyllic, and it carried on for days. For five days I felt completely energised.

Many of you have probably experienced something like this during or after sex too: a feeling of well-being which goes beyond sensual pleasure, and is caused by a change of consciousness. Perhaps earlier you felt stressed and worried, as if your life was full of problems – but often after sex everything seems miraculously different. Your problems seem to have disappeared (proving that to a large extent we create our own problems *by* worrying), and you seem to be glowing inwardly, as if a kind of dynamo has been switched on inside you, filling you with a feeling of completeness and serenity. Here, for example, an acquaintance of mine describes how she feels after she has orgasms:

I feel as if I haven't got any weight. There's a warm feeling running all through my body...Nothing else seems to matter, problems cease to exist, as if the feeling takes you over so much that there's no room for anything else. I feel capable of doing anything...

I also look at things more clearly, look beyond what I usually look at. The colours seem more distinct; if you look at, say, a tree, you see it for what it really is, not just as a tree. You see it as nature, not just as an object.

Sports can generate awakening experiences too, particularly fairly sedate and rhythmic sports like jogging and swimming. I've recently taken up running myself, and found that it has a powerful 'awakening' effect. I usually run for 20-25 minutes, around the fields close to my home. I'm not particularly fit or athletic (at least not at the moment) so I find it a little awkward to begin with, and feel that I'm not going to be able to run for very long. But after a few minutes I fall into a rhythm. The running becomes more effortless and my state of mind begins to change. If mind is busy with chattering thoughts, I begin to 'dis-identify' with them, to detach myself from them and allow them to fade away. After 15 minutes or so I stop – partly for a short rest but mainly so that I can look at my surroundings. Everything around me looks more beautiful and striking – the trees seem more real and distinct, and the dark of the sky seems rich and powerful. When I look at the sky, I sometimes have a sense that I'm really here, on the surface of this planet, with the universe stretching everywhere around me. It feels amazing to be alive in the midst of it all, and sometimes my individuality seems to fade away and I become aware of myself as a part of the whole universe. The whole universe is alive and that alive-ness flows through me and is a part of me.

I run for another 5 or 10 minutes after my break, and by the time I get home I'm filled with a glow of well-being which lasts for the rest of the evening. I feel content and complete, and my mind seems impervious to worries, resentments or aversions. As a result, running has become a form of spiritual practice for me.

## **The Causes of Awakening Experiences**

There are two basic types of awakening experiences, which have two distinct causes. The first are wild, ecstatic experiences that happen when the normal physiological balance of our brain and bodies is disrupted. This is why, throughout history, people have tried to bring about spiritual experiences by fasting, going without sleep, dancing frenziedly, doing breathing exercises, and taking psychedelic drugs. All of these activities disrupt our normal physiology, changing our body temperature, blood pressure or metabolic rate, and causing dehydration, exhaustion or chemical changes. And when this happens there's a chance that we'll have an awakening experience. This certainly doesn't always happen, of course. Most of the time the only effect that depriving yourself of sleep and food often has is to make you feel miserably tired and hungry. Usually this awakening effect only occurs in the context of a religious ritual or ceremony.

The second type of spiritual experiences are more serene and calm states which occur when our life-energy (or vitality) becomes more intensified than normal. This can happen in any situation when we're very relaxed, when there's peacefulness around us, and when our minds become quiet. In meditation, for example, we intensify our life-energy by being inactive and withdrawing our attention from the world around us. But most importantly, by focusing on a mantra (or a candle flame or on our breathing or any other object) we slow down and quieten our mental chatter. We often don't realise it, but this 'thought-chatter' - the endless stream of memories, daydreams, worries and impressions that fills our minds whenever our attention isn't occupied - uses up a massive amount of mental energy. And so when this chatter becomes quieter, or even fades away altogether, our life-energy becomes much more intense. This extra energy fuels our perceptions, so that the world becomes a much more beautiful and harmonious place, and fills us with a sense of well-being.

This is also why nature can trigger awakening experiences. Its beauty and power can have a similar effect to a mantra, quietening our mental chatter, until our life-energy intensifies and we become still and quiet inside. The same applies to running and swimming, with their repetitive rhythm. And listening to music, dancing and sex can also have the same mind-quietening and energy-intensifying effect. The sheer pleasure of sex can have the effect of shifting our attention away from our ego-minds, which may fall silent as a result.

## **Generating Awakening Experiences**

If we know what causes awakening experiences, then in theory we should be able to generate them at will. If you like, you could do this through this disrupting your physiology, by regularly fasting, going without sleep or taking psychedelic drugs. However, it goes without saying that this could be dangerous to your health, both physical and psychological. With this kind of awakening experiences, you have little control over what's happening to you, and there's also the risk of not being prepared for the intense realities you gain access to.

It's more sensible to try to induce the second type of awakening experiences, by making a conscious effort to intensify your life-energy. An important part of this is learning to be inactive, and how to relax. Many of us spend our lives rushing from one activity to the next, filling our free time with endless entertainments and distractions, never allowing ourselves to do nothing or to be alone with ourselves. But once we learn how to do this, there is a whole host of activities we can do – dancing, playing or listening to music, swimming, meditation, walking in the countryside, sex – with the aim of generating awakening experiences. Simply knowing that we're likely to 'wake up' once these activities have helped our minds to become quiet and still will increase the likelihood of us having the experiences.

## **Permanent Wakefulness**

But ultimately, we need to make wakefulness our *normal*, everyday state. This might seem impossible: surely we would find life impossible if we were continually aware of the beauty and harmony of the world, and of our own oneness with it? But if we were naturally awake, this awareness could be a state which was always potentially there, and which we could tune into whenever we desired, at the same time as dealing with the tasks of everyday life.

Becoming permanently awake means having a permanently high intensity of life-energy inside us. We can achieve this by trying to make sure that our lives are never too stressful or hectic, that we have regular periods of silence and solitude, and that we regularly meditate or do some other form of 'energy-intensifying' practice. *Service* is important too. Whether it's bringing up children, doing voluntary or community work, helping elderly neighbours, performing service for others helps us to connect to a wider reality, a shared human consciousness beyond our individual selves. As a result – hopefully – the boundaries of the ego become softer, which helps us to move towards wakefulness.

In a sense wakefulness is natural. Some of the world's indigenous peoples seem to live in a natural state of wakefulness. They naturally possess a heightened perception, a sense of the aliveness of things and, an awareness of spirit-force pervading the world. Young children are naturally awake too. They see the world in a much more real and intense way than adults, experience a powerful natural well-being and often have intense spiritual experiences, where they become one with the world, or see it pervaded with an intense spiritual radiance.

So by having awakening experiences, or even moving to a state of permanent wakefulness, we're really only going back to our original state, returning to the state of well-being, wonder and connection which is our birthright.

## **Tips on generating awakening experiences**

Go running in natural surroundings, such as a park or field. Give yourself up to the rhythm of your legs, and allow your thinking mind to become quiet.

Listen to music with full attention, and with a quiet mind. Let the music wash over you, fill your whole being, until you forget yourself and your surroundings.

Meditate for 20 minutes, focusing on a mantra, or on the rhythm of your breathing. Let the chatter of your mind fade away, and be conscious of your own inner energy, filling your body

inside. After meditation, walk into your garden, or into some nearby fields, and become aware of its beauty and is-ness.

### **What can we do to make wakefulness our normal state?**

To become permanently and constantly 'awake', we need to build up a permanently high intensity of life-energy inside us, which we can do by following these guidelines:

**Meditate regularly.** Regular meditation has a cumulative effect. It makes our minds permanently quieter, and so permanently intensifies our life-energy.

**Practise mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a form of meditation which you can practise in your daily life. As you walk, be mindful of your feet touching the ground, and of the surroundings you're walking amongst. When eating, be fully attentive to the taste of the food, and the sensations it creates in your mouth.

**Enjoy Silence and Solitude.** Many of us try to avoid solitude and silence, but we should learn to relish them as an opportunity to completely relax and make contact with our true selves.

**Service.** Helping and supporting others makes us less self-centred and more connected to the universe.

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