

A New Earth – Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose

*Eckhart Tolle (± \$25).
Penguin Books 2005*

This book is a follow-up to the author’s *The Power of Now*. In this book he describes a spiritual framework that goes beyond the ego. “This book is one of those reads that makes you see yourself, the impact of your attachment to ego, and your experience of life with clarity and simplicity. You don’t read this book, it reads you!” (comment by member of Circle for Dangerous Thinking that suggested the book). Also, from our group discussion: “This book helped me better understand things I instinctively knew”

Tolle talks about a spiritual awakening that he sees happening in the world today. His aim is to assist readers to bring about a shift in consciousness (to “awaken” p6), to discover this new earth that is emerging and to be included in it. Evil or sin, to Tolle, means to him be non-spiritual (page 22). The secret to happiness (peace) is to make peace with the present moment. “The present moment is the field on which the game of life happens.” (page 115).

Several concepts from philosophy (Descartes, especially Sartre, but also others), world religions (mainly Christian and Hindu and Zen Buddhism) and psychology (Freud, Jung and others) are used and applied in a somewhat eclectic fashion to invite the reader into a new consciousness.

Examples abound, such as the concept of viewing “normal” as a dysfunction close to mental illness, or the Christian understanding of “sin” as one of missing the point of human existence. Goodness resides within the person and the key is to allow that goodness to emerge. The “blueprint for dysfunction that every human being carries within is the ego.” (page 13). Or his redefining of forgiveness as “non-reaction” (page 63).

For Tolle “A new heaven” is the emergence of a transformed state of human consciousness, and “a new earth” is its reflection in the physical realm (page 23).

There are some interesting sections on our over emphasis on the value of thought, even to the point where the mind might be seen as the enemy. The passages containing the stories about dealing with and letting go of the past (pp138-139) are worth reading and challenging.

The little chapter on “Not minding what happens” (p198) needs a lot more detail. It comes across as very much coming from a person who is privileged to live among the top few percent (in terms of income and opportunities) to readily argue that we can withdraw to this level from a world that is truly in crisis in many parts. Those dying in Afghanistan and Somalia might not find this so easy to read ... that is if they’re had the privilege of learning to read.

The thing that bothered me most about this book wasn’t the different slant on human consciousness or the attempt to redefine our self-understanding, but the seemingly naïve way he seems to see/describe the world. A few examples (with my critical questions in brackets):

- “I didn’t realise yet that thinking without awareness *is* the main dilemma of human existence” (Page 32 – Surely life is not that simple?)
- “Nobody is wrong. It is the ego in someone, that’s all.” (Page 76 – that sound a bit like blame-shifting to me).
- “You want peace. There is no one who does not want peace” (Page 77 – oversimplified? Most Al Qaida members might not agree with him that they’re simply looking for peace – neither would their victims, I’m guessing).

- “The primary cause of unhappiness is *never* the situation but your thoughts about it” (Page 96 – my italics. Has he seen real suffering?)
- “(Removing time) ... is the *only* true spiritual practice.” (Page 207 – my italics. Just too simplistic?)
- Claiming that excessive television watching is largely responsible for attention deficit disorder (page 232) with no evidence offered or source quoted?
- “Children who have suffered greatly often grow into young adults who are mature beyond their years (Page 286-287). Honestly, one cannot generalise like that without expecting some criticism. Has he been exposed to children who been abused?”

Despite these criticisms, this book opens up a world of self exploration and offers a lot to reflect on for those approaching it with an open mind. I would invite you to look past the naivety and have a read! Explore your modalities of awakened doing, which are acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm.

A closing note. Our group discussion at the Circle for Dangerous Thinking (see our web site at www.perthunitingchurch.com.au) has convinced me that we probably should have read this book's predecessor (The Power of Now) first. It has become clear from comments of those who have read it that his personal story of struggle, hardship, en depression would have made a big difference to my reading of this one.

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