

*For Audiobook listeners and for those who read the book digitally, it may be helpful to have the **Dear Reader** sections available for your own personal use or for use in your reading group. You'll find them below. (Note: you'll find British spelling in the version below.)*

## **Introduction**

Dear Reader,

Thanks for reading this introduction. I encourage you to open a new document on your computer, or get a journal to handwrite your responses to the questions below. You can also use these questions to prompt needed conversation with friends who read this book with you.

1. I explain in this chapter that I don't think this book is for everyone, but that those who need it really need it. Do you think this book is for you? Why or why not?
2. Have you been dancing with doom alone? Or have you had conversation partners to share the dance with you? How has it been?
3. Share your experiences with the stages of grief relating to our current situation: shock and denial, bargaining, anger, depression, acceptance, meaning.
4. How might you benefit by reading this book? Have you ever practised journaling before? What benefit might you receive from journaling? Have you ever been part of a reading group before? What benefits might you experience by forming or joining one?

One more thing. If at any point as you read, you feel emotionally overwhelmed, I invite you to either take a break for a week or two, or to skip ahead to parts 3 and 4, chapters 13 to 21. Yes, chapters 2 to 12 are really important, but for some readers, going to the end and then coming

back to the middle may make more sense.

## **Chapter 1.**

Dear Reader,

I introduce myself in this chapter by sharing my story about waking up to our current situation.

Here are some questions you can use as journal prompts alone, and as conversation starters with a reading group.

1. What did you learn about me in this chapter that interested you, or maybe concerned you?
2. Did you have a wise grandparent or other inspiring example like Grandpa Smith, and if so, what did that relationship mean to you?
3. Tell your story of waking up to our current situation.
4. Review the list of questions we'll address in this book. Which three or four questions do you resonate with most strongly, and why?[/nl][/box]

## **Chapter 2.**

Dear Reader,

I hope you made it through this chapter. For most readers, it will be the most challenging in the whole book, so you're through the worst of it already. If you are experiencing overwhelming feelings of depression and anxiety about our current situation, I encourage you to reach out to a mental health professional. You can find support in a number of places, including The Climate Psychology Alliance: (<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/index.php/find-support>).

At the end of chapter 1, I suggested you read this chapter with dual curiosity: wondering about what I was going to say and wondering what your reactions would be. I encourage you to consider these questions or prompts in private to help in that reflection:

1. Try to list (in writing, if possible) the emotions you felt as you read this chapter. Don't be afraid to admit that you hated some of what I wrote. I hate so much of this chapter too!
2. You might want to go back and connect specific emotions with specific paragraphs and think more deeply about why those paragraphs elicited those emotions.
3. If questions have arisen for you, please write those questions down before you forget them.
4. If you pray, I encourage you to write a prayer in which you open your heart about how you felt reading this chapter, and about how you are processing it now, in retrospect. If you don't pray, consider writing a letter to yourself and tell yourself what you think you need to hear.

Here are some additional questions to journal about or discuss with friends:

1. How does the phrase 'Welcome to reality' work for you? Can you think of other ways to say the same thing?
2. Summarise the four scenarios in your own words. Try to explain each one fairly, as if you thought it was the most likely to occur.
3. In this chapter, I mentioned your nervous system. What do you think reading this chapter did to your nervous system? What did reading it feel like in your body and in your conscious experience?
4. Practise saying, 'Welcome, self, to reality', and 'Welcome, reality, into my awareness.' How does each intention affect you?

5. How successful do you feel in welcoming the reality of both what you know and what you don't know? Reflect on the word 'unknowing'.

### Chapter 3.

Dear Reader,

As I mentioned earlier, if you're interested in learning some of the ways your 'meaning module' struggles to deal with disruptive information, check out appendix 6. There I share how common glitches called biases often sabotage our desire to meet reality.

1. In this chapter, I offer the metaphor of three committees that make up the board of directors of You, Incorporated. Summarise the function of the survival, belonging and meaning committees in your own words. If you're familiar with research on the left and right hemispheres of the brain, you can bring that understanding into play as well.
  2. How does this metaphor or model sit with you?
  3. Describe the idea of the connected or integrated self in your own words.
  4. How do you experience the survival, belonging and meaning committees when they're working against each other, and how do you experience them when they're integrated or connected?
  5. I say that your mind is part of the reality you're waking up to and welcoming. Why do you think I felt it necessary to emphasise the need for integration of your different committees or mental modules?
  6. If you feel that your levels of inner anxiety or despair are overwhelming, again, I encourage you to share your distress with friends or family in a circle of trust, or to seek support from a mental health professional. You can consult organisations like the Climate Psychology Alliance to find professionals who take these concerns



seriously: <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/>.

## Chapter 4.

Dear Reader,

Here are some questions to consider, alone or in a reading group, to go deeper in your reflection:

1. What role does poetry currently play in your life?
2. If you're like most people these days, it probably doesn't play much of a role.  
Why do you think poetry, which has been a primary art form throughout human history, seems so much less important now?
3. Compare and contrast the experience of reading a poem with watching a TV show or movie, and consider why shows and movies are so much more popular these days than poetry.
4. Then talk about the role TV shows and movies can play in helping us wake up, welcome reality, mind our minds, and grieve. Can you give any specific examples?
5. Choose one of the poems or song lyrics mentioned in this chapter. Look it up and spend some time with it. See how it affects you.
6. Consider how other art forms – dance, photography, film, painting, photography, sculpture, architecture, landscape architecture – help you taste the inexpressible bittersweetness of love and grief.

## Chapter 5.

Dear Reader,

I felt I took a risk in inviting you down the theological rabbit hole of eschatology, the study of the future and the end of the world according to various religious traditions. I felt it was a worthwhile risk, in the hope it would ease you into an insight you may have found offensive if I had said it from the start: that capitalism functions as a kind of religion, and that it can easily have cultic tendencies. Here are some questions for your personal reflection and group conversation:

1. How did you respond to my childhood story of the Chart of the Ages? How does it affect you when you realise that millions of people are still being taught this view that the past, present and future are already mapped out by God?
2. How do you respond to this conclusion I drew after attending the Sandy Cove Conference: 'Economics more often shapes theology than theology shapes economics'?
3. How do you respond to the idea that capitalism, like a religion, tells a story that frames our lives and determines what has value?
4. Offer any additional reflections you have on how religion and economics are contributing to our current situation.
5. If we step away from the framing stories or narratives told by conventional religion and conventional capitalism, where might a new story arise.

## Chapter 6.

Dear Reader,

When I felt the impact of the central idea of this chapter – that hope is complicated – I felt that I had a book that needed to be written. Here are some questions for you and your reading group to consider.

1. Was Miguel De La Torre's observation – 'Hope is what is fed to those who are being slaughtered so they won't fight what is coming' – new to you? How do you respond to it?
2. Put in your own words why hope is complicated, and why fierce, courageous, defiant love may be better words for what we need in our current situation.
3. Choose one of the definitions or quotations about hope in this chapter and explain what you appreciate about it.

## Chapter 7.

Dear Reader,

We're deep enough into this shared journey together that I felt you would be ready to grapple with some deep ideas ... about time and change, for starters. But I imagine that some of you may have felt that you showed up in a philosophy class you didn't sign up for. I hope I didn't lose you, and that you felt not just that you saw some new things, but that you could see everything in some new ways.

Here are some questions to reflect upon, write about and consider with friends.

1. How do you respond to this passage: 'I had always seen *things* as most real or fundamental, and change was merely something that happened to them over time.

I was coming to see change as most real and fundamental, and things were events that happen over time. Change became the constant in which things come and go, appear and disappear, form and fade away.’

2. I introduced the ideas of tipping points and lag times. Try to summarise them in your own words.
3. I talked about *rose-coloured glasses* and *the golden hour*, referring to a way of seeing the world that assumed that progress was inevitable. How attached do you feel to the idea of inevitable progress? Can you name some upsides and downsides to this way of seeing?
4. I explored a shift in seeing, from seeing in analytical lines (cause and effect, whole and part) to *seeing things whole* – spheres or fields or systems of complex interaction. Try to describe *seeing things whole* in your own words.
5. I offered a way of seeing our lives as four concentric spheres: personal sphere, social sphere, biosphere and geosphere. How did you feel as you tried to see in this way?
6. Respond to this statement: ‘The experience of doom takes a lot from us. But yes, it does bring certain gifts, one of which is a new clarity and depth of sight.’
- 7.

## Chapter 8.

Dear Reader,

1. How did you relate to my childhood education about Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro? Were you taught similarly, or did your teachers have a different approach?



2. Sometimes, authors risk being misunderstood to make a point boldly and bluntly. How did you respond to these two sentences: ‘Our civilisation is colonialism, and colonialism is our civilisation. Our civilisation is supremacy (racial, religious, ideological, national or human), and supremacy is our civilisation.’

3. If you are a descendant or beneficiary of colonisers, have you ever considered colonialism in this way? How did you begin to see history from the point of view of the indigenous, the colonised?

4. Respond to my interpretation of Jesus’ words, ‘The meek shall inherit the Earth.’

There’s a complex tradition in colonial history of romanticising indigenous people, often called the ‘myth of the noble savage’. It stands alongside another myth, the ‘myth of the brutal savage’, which was used to justify enslaving or eradicating indigenous peoples as inferior. I hope you can see that I’m not interested in perpetuating either of these myths. Instead, I’m trying to help us grasp that the current dominant way of seeing – through the eyes of colonisers – is not the only way to see, that there is a longstanding ‘minority report’ that resists colonising assumptions. Are you curious about seeing the Bible as an example of that minority report?

## **Chapter 9.**

Dear Reader,

1. You may have been surprised by this chapter’s provocative title, ‘Don’t read the Bible’. Why do you think I put it so provocatively?

2. I recommended a number of books by indigenous authors. Have you ever read a book by an indigenous author, or watched a movie by an indigenous filmmaker, or listened to a

lecture by an indigenous speaker? If yes, what did you learn, and if no, what book by an indigenous author might you like to read – either now, or as soon as you complete this book?

3. Choose one of the paragraphs where I offer a reading of the Bible as an indigenous text, and explore it more deeply. Perhaps go back and read relevant passages in the Bible, or compare what I've suggested to a commentary that offers a conventional interpretation. Or read through the notes to this chapter and do some further research.

4. Can you imagine a post-industrial and post-colonial civilisation that is truly ecological? Is civilisation without overshoot possible? Why or why not? What would it look like?

## **Chapter 10.**

Dear Reader,

This chapter is an invitation to critical thinking, which is the careful, intentional and self-aware process of acquiring and evaluating information with the goal of understanding accurately and living wisely. Critical thinking is important because nearly all of us think we're above-average thinkers, and we are prone at times to jump to conclusions that we later regret. For that reason, critical thinkers keep in mind that their reasoning is often flawed and their judgements premature, that they are prone to biases and errors, and that their personal perspective and experience give them both advantages and disadvantages in understanding what is real and true.

Critical thinking is hard work because it requires taking many factors into consideration, including evidence, context, assumptions, methods, bias, self-interest, conflicts of interest, intended and unintended consequences, conscious and unconscious criteria, logical fallacies and

virtue. Critical thinkers learn to separate their ego from their opinions, and they learn to live with uncertainty and ambiguity. They pursue understanding with patience, persistence and humility, and they freely admit they may be wrong or their understanding may be partial or one-sided.

Critical thinking involves curiosity (a strong, sincere desire to know the truth, even if the truth is painful or costly), imagination and creativity (viewing a subject from multiple perspectives), the ability both to trust or to give a fair hearing to others and to doubt or question others, along with the ability to think for oneself and question one's own current thinking. In our current situation, when so much is at stake, it makes sense for us to strengthen our critical thinking skills. 'Maybe it's good; maybe it's not' is one important step in that direction.

1. In your journal or with your reading group, take the description of critical thinking above and evaluate yourself as honestly as you can. What elements are you weak in and strong in?
2. How might you strengthen your critical thinking skills?
3. In what way is critical thinking an individual sport – and a team sport?

You might even pause and consider how well you have been practising critical thinking in reading the first ten chapters of this book. Maybe you will find some places where you think I need to think more critically as well. And maybe you will sense that there is a kind of thinking that goes beyond critical thinking: the thinking that comes naturally in Rumi's field.

## **Chapter 11.**

Dear Reader,

You may feel that I was lying when I told you that chapter 2 was the most emotionally challenging of the book, because you found this chapter to be more so. But however challenging, I hope you felt it was meaningful, important, needed.

Whether in a journal for your own reflection, or with others for shared conversation, I

hope you'll begin by recounting (as I did at the beginning of this chapter) your own feelings about death since you first became aware of death as a child.

1. Do you feel your feelings about death changing as a result of your engagement with this chapter?
2. Why might overcoming our 'denial of death' be especially necessary in a time of doom, when we face a number of existential threats, not just to our individual survival, but also to the survival of our species and major parts of the biosphere?
3. Some readers, knowing of my faith background, might be surprised when I reject the popular religious teaching that death is a punishment for human sin rather than a feature of the universe. Can you reflect upon some of the scientific, theological and ecological reasons I might take this approach?
4. Can you see any other way, besides learning to 'face head on' our death terror and denial of death, to avoid 'collective neuroticism' in a time of fear?
5. How does the mantra 'I am a candle' work for you? If not, can you develop a better alternative?

## Chapter 12

Dear Reader,

Perhaps you now see why I grouped these chapters together under the heading 'Letting Be'. To be willing to open our eyes in new ways. To see indigenous people as holding wisdom that the 'civilized' lack. To learn to face and to embrace our own mortality. To experience an intervention regarding our civilisation's addiction. To feel our fossil-fuelled power and our paradoxical powerlessness.

These considerations take time and space, being admitted to an inner sanctuary in which we're not obsessed with fixing and solving and doing, doing, doing. They require us to shift our focus, at least momentarily, from what we do, fix, solve and know to who we are and desire to become. They require letting some dust settle and panic pass.

1. The word 'admit' is important in this chapter. Reflect on that word.
2. The experience of *addiction* is also important in this chapter. Does the diagnosis of our civilisation as addictive ring true with you?
3. I suggest that fossil fuels have given us delusions of omnipotence. Reflect on that idea. What other elements of our civilisation may also make us delusional?
4. The Bayo Akomolafe quote that begins this chapter echoes through it. How does his question sit with you?

Do you feel you are ready to move from *Letting Be* to *Letting Come*? Or do you need to pause here a little longer?

### Chapter 13.

Dear Reader,

1. At the beginning of this chapter, I share an experience of *the vastness of time*. Have you ever had an experience like this?
2. In that vastness of time, I am able to consider the fact that we are not the first ones here. How does that realisation help me? Does it help you, and how?
3. Review the four phases of the adaptive cycle and explain each in terms of a forest, an individual human life, or our civilisation: exploitation, conservation, release, reorganisation.

4. How do you respond to the idea that our job, during release, is to stop trying to return to conservation and instead turn our focus to reorganisation? What would reorganisation mean in our four scenarios: Collapse Avoidance, Collapse/Rebirth, Collapse/Survival, Collapse/Extinction?

## Chapter 14.

Dear Reader,

In your journal or with a reading group, I invite you to reflect on and respond to four selections from this chapter:

- ‘You can always have your way if you have enough ways.’
- ‘The more we prepared for a painful situation, the less painful it was when it happened.’
- ‘We will imagine ways to resist decline, ways to fix broken systems, ways to recover lost ground, even if temporarily ... [We] will imagine ways to cope with loss and grief, ways to self-organise to support one another, ways to fill gaps and share resources ... [We] will imagine new worlds.’
- ‘Our first act in fulfilling our commitment is to imagine such a world, or better, to imagine many such worlds and many ways to get there.’

## Chapter 15.

Dear Reader,

In this chapter, I contrasted collective intelligence and collective stupidity, acknowledging that in times of doom, we will be pulled towards the latter unless we choose consciously to seek the former.

1. The chapter begins with a story about a young man who had the honesty to admit he was afraid, and whose vulnerability created connection. Can you think of a similar experience, where people were brought together by one person's vulnerability?
2. How did you feel about my choice of strong words like 'stupidity' and 'ignorance'?
3. I did my best to show that even bad ideas have allure, and part of their allure is a spoonful of truth. Which of the nine examples interested you the most, and why?
4. Respond to this statement: 'It only takes two or three to build an island of sanity in a world on fire.'
5. The end of the chapter includes a number of concrete suggestions for building islands of sanity now, before things get a lot worse (which could happen faster than we think). Which of them do you feel motivated to put into practice?

## **Chapter 16.**

Dear Reader,

1. In this chapter, I offer seven specific ways in which we will need to grow tougher in turbulent times. Review them, and pick one or two that ring true most strongly with you these days.

Explain why.

2. Respond to this saying: 'As the child is to the adult, so is the adult to the sage.'

3. Think of the beloved children in your life. Imagine if one of them came to you crying and said, 'I'm really scared about what's happening to the Earth, and especially climate change, and all the people saying mean and hateful things, and I wonder if I'm going to be safe.' What

might you say to demonstrate empathy, assure them of your supportive presence, and give them the confidence that if life gets tough, you and they together can get tougher?[/ext]

## Chapter 17.

Dear Reader,

1. I mention getting a ‘strange high’ from ugly news. Have you ever felt this high, or seen it in others? What is so alluring and addictive about ugly news?

2. Think of a beautiful place that you love. Try to put into words what you love about it.

Try to visit it soon.

3. Think of ‘beautiful people doing beautiful things’ – people you know about or have heard about. Share their stories. If possible, send them a note or message of encouragement and appreciation.

4. Near the end of this chapter, I share a story of sitting around a campfire with a group of people. If you were to plan such a gathering, where people come together with beauty to share, who would you invite and why?

5. Experiment with using this ‘beauty abounds’ mantra (or your own version of it) each day for at least a week or two. Notice what happens when you remember, with Tolkein’s Frodo and Sam, that ‘there’s some good in this world, Mr Frodo ... and it’s worth fighting for.’

## Chapter 18.

Dear Reader,

1. I wonder how you responded to my use of the *F*-word in this chapter.

2. Even more, I wonder how you respond to the difference between giving up hope and



giving up.

3. I wonder how you respond to the words ‘magnificent’ and ‘magnificently’ in the two passages I quoted.

4. I wonder how you responded to me sharing why I’m glad I get to be alive now, and I wonder if you feel the same way. (It’s OK if you don’t. I might be asking too soon.)

5. Whether alone or with your reading group, I encourage you to play Michael Franti’s song at full volume and maybe even throw a dance party. [/nl][ /box]

## Chapter 19.

Dear Reader,

1. How do you respond to the parable of the rich fool (or idiot billionaire)?

In all likelihood, Luke’s Gospel was written ten to twenty years after the crushing of the Jewish revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, so it’s very possible that the author wove this story together as commentary on that fact. Imagine how a story like this would affect survivors of the collapse of Israeli society.

2. In this chapter, I’m recommending that we begin disentangling our identities, withdrawing our consent, and detaching our ambitions from our current civilisation. That doesn’t mean we hate our civilisation. No, it has much of value along with its fatal flaws, so we must love it and salvage from it what has great value. We must fulfil our daily responsibilities, love our neighbours, and strive for justice and peace as participants in this civilisation. And we also must acknowledge that our civilisation is in overshoot, and a civilisation in overshoot has much in common with the rich man congratulating himself on his plans for bigger barns. What would it look like and feel like for you to engage in

this kind of disentanglement, withdrawal and detachment? What would it mean to shift the terms of your struggle – from ‘making it’ in the current system to imagining and embodying a better way of life that could arise from the ashes when it burns down?

3. Can you see how it takes a degree of detachment to understand that even if our civilisation in its current form is doomed, it doesn’t mean humanity is doomed? And can you see how it takes a degree of detachment to understand that doom will run its course, and life will go on?
4. How do you respond to the story of Mahalia Jackson and Dr King? What does it mean to you to hear these words: ‘Tell them about the dream, [insert your name here

## Chapter 20.

Dear Reader,

When I began this writing project, I thought that the last few chapters would be some kind of call to action, some clarity about *the plan*. (More about that in the next and final chapter.) I didn’t expect it would include a mystical celebration of energy, detachment and the cosmic dance!

1. Whether in your journal or with friends, I invite you to reflect upon how this chapter sits with you, beginning with my energy epiphany. Even if it feels elusive to you, does it feel enticing?
2. In the paragraph that begins with ‘First, you start waking up’, I offer a short review of the whole book that continues through five paragraphs. See if those paragraphs can help you review our journey together so far.
3. At the end of the previous chapter, I shared the story of how Mahalia Jackson told Dr King to ‘Tell them about the dream, Martin.’ At the end of this chapter, I imagined that I


was standing in front of you, my readers, and Mahalia spoke the same encouragement to me. I didn't plan what I would write: I tried to improvise, and what you read is what flowed out. How does my articulation of my dream land with you? Maybe you could write your own articulation of your dream in under five hundred words (which was the length of Dr King's improvised ending).

4. A wise friend once shared an insight that has guided my life, first as a pastor and preacher, then as a writer: 'Learning is not the consequence of teaching; learning is the consequence of thinking.' What are you thinking about as you finish this chapter and prepare to read this book's final chapter?

## Chapter 21 and Afterword

Dear Reader,

1. "Nobody had the plan.... Everything matters, and some things matter more than others." What feelings and thoughts arise as you reflect upon these two statements?
2. In Chapter 21, I offer 15 statements in the "Everything matters, and some things matter more than others" pattern. Choose 2 or 3 that stand out to you and share why.
3. How would you answer, "What is mine to do?" right at this moment? How might your answer to this question change over the coming weeks or months?
4. In the Afterword, I say that I can't imagine what will happen between the moment I finish writing the book and the moment you will be reading it. What do you think has changed significantly since the book came out in May 2024?
5. How do you respond to Jim Finley's parable, "The Awakening?" If you feel inspired (be prepared, you just might!), consider writing a poem, prayer, or meditation in response.
6. If you plan to have a group party or campfire to celebrate your completion of this book,



consider a) writing a letter to yourself that you could read aloud to the group, b) consider writing a letter to the group in which you summarize two or three of your key takeaways from your shared experience, and/or c) consider writing a thank you letter to the group in which you name one thing that each participant brought to you and what the group as a whole brought to you.