



**Ben Okri's epic poem, Mental Fight** is an inspirational hymn to overcoming our mind's capacity for destruction and to create new ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving and relating to one's fellow human being. As such, it contains much with which people with experience of mental illness and recovery can particularly identify. The poem pays homage to William Blake, the creator of the phrase 'Mental Fight' immortalised in the now famous hymn, Jerusalem (I shall not cease from Mental Fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand). Okri wrote Mental Fight to mark the new Millennium in the year 2000. He describes it as an 'anti-spell' for the 21st century and it is dedicated to 'Humanity in the Aquarian Age'.

Ben Okri was born in Minna, Nigeria, [1959] but now lives in London.

**BEN OKRI'S An Anti-spell for the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'MENTAL FIGHT'  
'an angry, hopeful, weary, wary, epic reveille to the human spirit. Times**

**To humanity in the aquarian age: I will not cease from mental fight,  
nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, till we have built Jerusalem .....**  
**William Blake**

**1. TIME TO BE REAL.**

I  
An illusion by which we can become  
More real.  
A moment unremarked by the universe,  
By nature, the seasons, or stars.  
Moment we have marked out  
In timelessness.  
Human moment.  
Making a ritual, a drama, a tear  
On eternity.  
Domesticating the infinite.  
Contemplating the quantum questions,  
Time, death, new beginnings,  
Regeneration, cycles, the unknown.

II  
Allow un contemplated regions  
Of time to project themselves  
Into your sleeping consciousness,  
Inducing terror or mental liberation  
Much as death concentration  
Paralyses some with despair  
Makes others poison  
Themselves with emptiness  
But releases in a fortunate few  
A quality of enlightenment  
A sense of the limited time we have  
Here on earth to live magnificently  
To be as great and happy as we can  
To explore our potential to the fullest  
And to lose our fear of death  
Having gained a greater love  
And a reverence for life  
And its incommensurable golden brevity.

So it is with this moment.  
A gigantic death  
And an enormous birth.  
This mighty moment.  
In timelessness.

### III

Illusions are useful only if we use them  
To help us get to our true reality.  
Initiations and rituals, if they are noble,  
Have this power,  
(They magnify the secret hour)  
They enable us to pass from  
The illusion of our lesser selves  
To the reality of our greater selves,  
Our soaring powers.

They free us from our smallness,  
'Our humiliated consciousness', as Camus said,  
And they deliver us  
Into what we really are  
What we sometimes suspect we are  
What we glimpse we are when in love,  
Magnificent and mysterious beings  
Capable of creating civilisations  
Out of the wild lands of the earth  
And the dark places in our consciousness.  
We are, in ways small and great,  
The figures, the myths and legends  
That we ourselves have invented.  
Our dreams are self-portraits.  
Our myths, our heroic legends,  
Are the concealed autobiography  
Of the human race  
And its struggles  
Through darkness to light  
And through higher darkness again.

### IV

Human kind cannot live long  
With the notion  
Or the reality  
Of timelessness.  
Only in the mind.  
Only in the spirit.  
With us, things must have a beginning.  
Theatre grew from ritual,  
And ritual grew out of the silence.  
Here, now, is an origin.  
We are poised always at the threshold  
Of an unknown, unwritten, unforeseen act.  
Let's gather ourselves together,  
Clear our minds,  
Make ourselves present to ourselves  
And to our age.  
That we be focussed  
On this stage.  
That we concentrate.  
And listen.  
That we prepare ourselves  
In seriousness  
And with joy.  
Let's be wonderfully awake  
For what we are going to create,  
To make happen,  
In this mass co-scripting  
Of the future.

### V

Now is a material event.  
It is also a spiritual moment.  
And the blinding light of the real

Can pierce through and tear  
Asunder the unreal.  
Every moment thus carries  
The ordinary and the monumental:  
Staring out of an office window  
Or being blinded, like Paul,  
On the plain road to Damascus,  
By the light of true seeing.  
Then the celluloid of what seems  
Like the real world  
Is stripped away.  
And behind it all we see things  
As they could be.  
A better world, new, a world renewed.  
This moment is thus,  
It carries dust and dreams  
Pavement or streams.  
A moment on the clock  
Or a moment of the spirit.  
I dream of what it can be  
I dream of what this  
Millennial moment can be,  
What we could let it be:

A wonderful excuse for beginning  
A clearing out of the garbage  
In our histories and our consciousness.  
Best excuse in a thousand years  
To transcend our grim ancient fears.

## VI

Everyone loves a Spring cleaning.  
Let's have a humanity cleaning.  
Open up history's chamber of horrors  
And clear out the skeletons behind the mirrors,  
Put our breeding nightmares to flight  
Transform our monsters with our light.  
Clear out the stables  
In our celebrated fables  
A giant cleaning  
Is no mean undertaking.  
A cleaning of pogroms and fears  
Of genocide and tears  
Of torture and slavery  
Hatred and brutality.  
Let's turn around and face them  
Let's turn around and face them  
The bullies that our pasts have become  
Let's turn around and face them  
Let's make this clearing-out moment  
A legendary material atonement.

## 2. SIGNS FROMM THE OLD TIMES

### I

O the hallucinations that can fall upon you  
When you resist revelation,  
When you resist epiphanies,  
When you close yourself  
Off from enlightenment.  
The opposite of a spiritual dawn  
Is a universal nightmare.  
Then the mind multiplies  
The illusion of things  
Till they become not gods,  
But god-like monsters.  
O the nightmare visions

Of Breughel and Bosch,  
The infernos of druggies  
The neurotic hades  
Are but the mental productions  
Of illusions gone utterly wrong.  
Apocalyptic visions are of great value.  
They show us what the world  
Will be like if we don't  
Open ourselves to the other side,  
To light, to freed thinking.  
They are moral signposts  
On the way to hell.

II  
What will we choose?  
Will we allow ourselves to descend  
Into universal chaos and darkness?  
A world without hope, without wholeness  
Without moorings, without light  
Without possibility for mental fight,  
A world breeding mass murderers  
Energy vampires, serial killers  
With minds spinning in anomie and amorality  
With murder, rape, genocide as normality?  
Or will we allow ourselves merely to drift  
Into an era of more of the same  
An era drained of significance, without shame,  
Without wonder or excitement,  
Just the same low-grade entertainment,  
An era boring and predictable  
'Flat, stale, weary and unprofitable'  
In which we drift  
In which we drift along  
Too bored and too passive to care  
About what strange realities rear  
Their heads in our days and nights,  
Till we awake too late to the death of our rights  
Too late to do anything  
Too late for thinking  
About what we have allowed  
To take over our lives  
While we cruised along in casual flight  
Mildly indifferent to storm or sunlight?

III  
Or might we choose to make  
This time a waking-up event  
A moment of world empowerment?  
To pledge, in private, to be more aware  
More playful, more tolerant, and more fair  
More responsible, more wild, more loving  
Awake to our unsuspected powers, more amazing.

We rise or fall by the choice we make  
It all depends on the road we take  
And the choice and the road each depend  
On the light that we have, the light we bend,  
On the light we use  
Or refuse  
On the lies we live by  
And from which we die.

IV  
Every moment thus carries  
The monumental in the ordinary,  
Transcending the political

Hinting at the evolutionary.  
Great sudden leaps of consciousness,  
Spontaneous descents into atavism  
Might all seem revolutionary  
But they are merely the seeds,  
Long hidden in the earth,  
Bursting forth into shoot.  
They are merely the moments  
In which what was hidden  
Growing unseen in history's depths,  
Suddenly combusts, brings forth its truest forms,  
Revealing its real nature.  
The speed and suddenness of an appearance  
Is really only that moment  
When we become aware  
Of the change in a condition  
(As in an enchanter's invocation)  
A change that has been changing  
All along, without our being aware of it.

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#### V

And so under the powerful sun  
And fertile intensity of this great moment  
Many thoughts, forms, philosophies,  
Regressions, advancements, tendencies,  
Many hybrids, fusings, contortions,  
And startling, sinister combinations  
Pour out noisily  
From the weird oracles of humanity.  
A tidal wave of them.  
Many things and signs  
From the old times  
Speed forth to fruition  
Born too quickly  
Too violently, too silently  
The world aquiver with peculiar spawns  
Born into early sunlight and harsh dawns.  
And there would be too many gods  
Too many Delphis  
An unholy babbling  
All over the narrow spaces.  
Everywhere an excess of dreams,

Of forebodings, of art forms,  
Of rituals, and ways, and interpretations,  
Of roads, and signs and wonders,  
Of prognostications, and wayward visions.  
Babel is rebuilt amongst us.  
Babel is reborn.

## VI

We know only two kinds of response  
To the unknown.  
Awe, or noise,  
Silence, or terror;  
Humility, or paralysis;  
Prayer, or panic;  
Stillness, or speech;  
Watchfulness, or myth-making;  
Seeing clearly, or inventing what we see;  
Standing, or fleeing;  
Reasoning, or falling apart;  
Courage, or cowardice.  
The unknown lives with us  
Lives in each moment.  
Like a new millennium,  
The unknown is as richly potent  
As the critical mass  
Of our mass minds  
Facing the momentous.

Humanity is at its most radioactive.  
Fusing and fissioning.  
Giving off energies abundant  
Like so many little solar systems.  
Hurling out so many seeds,  
Like the fertile season in great forests.  
Out of these energies,  
Out of time's sifting,  
Will come a new future,  
Unrecognizable to those of us who live  
And breathe now.  
And out of so many seeds,  
(Innumerable deeds,)  
Will come a new humanity That legend has no need  
Which will owe much  
To this point of the cusp,  
To this moment in which we live,  
To now, here, as we move  
Towards flowing future time  
That bears us ever onwards Into eternity.

We are the best placed farmers  
Of new time.  
We are at a precious moment  
In time's ovulation.  
We are now at that rare intersection  
That magic favours,  
That history adores,  
That legend has no needs embellish  
Because it is already a legendary moment  
In its own wonderful right.

## VII

How often have great minds  
In the past prayed, and wished  
For better favoured moments  
In time to unleash their best  
Gifts on humanity?

This is one such conjunction:  
It fills the heart with too much humility  
And amazement to behold.  
But we must behold it, with minds calm,  
With aspirations clear,  
And with the smile in the soul  
That only those fortunate people have  
Who find themselves at the right time,  
At the perfect mythic conjunction  
That is also a living moment.  
A moment lived through.

We are living in enchanted time.  
With our spirits right  
We can enchant the future.  
With our love's might  
We can give a truer meaning to our past.

### **THREE: Is humanity exhausted?**

I  
Is time exhausted?  
No, time is yet young,  
And has timeless millennia ahead,  
Way beyond our furthest dreams.

Is nature exhausted?  
Ask the oak-trees, the hollies,  
The flowers, birds, fishes, and lions.  
They will continue for as long  
As the earth allows them.

Is humanity exhausted?  
Individuals are, nations are,  
Some civilisations are becoming so,  
But humanity isn't.

The hungry nations are hungry still.  
The starving people dream of food.  
The unfree fight for freedom.  
The oppressed plan for liberation.  
The small scheme for might.  
The invisible prepare for higher visibility

They are only exhausted  
Who think they are.  
They are only exhausted who no longer  
Have a reason to strive  
And dream and hope.

They are only exhausted who think  
That they have arrived  
At their final destination,  
The end of their road,  
With all of their dreams achieved,  
And with no new dreams to hold.

The exhausted are those who have  
Come to the end of their powers  
Of imagination, who have limited  
Their possibilities, who have thought  
Themselves into the dead ends  
That they call the highest  
Points of their civilisations.

Those who are exhausted have lost  
The greater picture,  
The greater perspective.  
They are trapped in their own labyrinth,  
Their lovelessness, selfishness.  
For those with limited dreams,  
There is chaos to come.  
Disintegration. Nightmares.  
I hear them talk about the end  
Of history.  
But those of us who haven't tasted  
The best fruits of time yet,  
To whom history has been harsh,  
We think differently.  
We know that history is all there  
To be made in the future.

Exhaustion is a mental thing,  
The absence of a spiritual viewpoint,  
A universal vision,  
A sense of new journeys,  
Higher discoveries.

There is no exhaustion where there is much  
To be hoped for, much to work towards,  
And where the dreams and sufferings  
Of our ancestors  
Have not been realised,  
Or redeemed.

There is no exhaustion  
When you can still visualise  
A better life for those who suffer.  
Visualise universal justice.  
A leavening of the great dough  
Of humanity.  
Uplifting the multitudes.

But when you can no longer dream  
No longer see possibilities  
No longer see alternatives;  
When you can see only limitation  
Only despair, and negation,  
Then you are in the way.  
You are also the problem.  
The exhausted obstruct  
The creation of a greater future.

The exhausted should therefore clear  
The stage for new dreamers -  
For warriors of love, justice,  
And enlightenment.

II  
Have all thoughts, possibilities, ideas,  
Philosophies been exhausted?  
Has Christianity found its fullest  
Fruition in great cathedrals, charities,  
Schisms, wars, orthodoxies,  
And sundry creeds?  
I do not believe that Christianity  
Has yet yielded ailing humanity  
Its best fruits. Unrealised remain  
Her fullest possibilities.

Have Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism,  
Islam, Humanism and Existentialism  
All the spiritual aspirations of the race  
All thoughts of social organisation  
All ideas technological and scientific  
Have they all been richly realised  
Fully mined and made to serve  
And ennoble and feed humankind?  
I don't think so either.  
Look at history and see what you find.

#### **FOUR: THE STONY GROUND**

##### **I**

Humanity has been so much like a child  
With too many useful toys,  
Playing with each one that comes along,  
And discarding it when something  
Newer appears in its midst.

We have been dilettantes and amateurs  
With some of our greatest notions  
For human betterment.  
We have been like spoilt children:  
We have been like tyrannical children;  
We have been impatient and imperious  
Demanding proof when listening is required,  
Tearing things down when they don't do  
What we want them to do  
(How much simpler to let things do only  
What they can do)  
Being uncreative about what seems dark  
And terrifying;  
Preferring only what seems easy  
And effortless;  
Asking about the numbers of a philosophy's  
Followers rather than examining  
The efficacy of its ideas;

Wandering down blind alleys of populism  
That lead to concentration camps;  
Refusing to admit our vast crimes and mistakes  
Denying the horrors of the slave trade  
Minimising the reality of the gas chambers  
Tearing our hair out in futile attempts  
To reconcile civilisation with genocide,  
When civilisation (as we have come to accept it)  
Never did mean true universal goodness  
Of heart, but rather the self-mythology  
Of a people, a race.  
No, neither the good in us  
Nor our capacity for evil are exhausted.  
And time will show just how young  
We are in our abilities,  
Our genius for good and evil.  
For all these strains, unexamined, unredeemed,  
Will find their higher fruition  
In the unlit centuries to come.

We carry with us, across the silver river  
Of the new age, many ambiguous  
And deadly seeds,  
And many seeds of illumination too.  
We are the sum total of the history  
That we have not truly examined.  
We are the carriers of history's  
Future diseases or cures.

The sooner we face the spawn  
We carry within us in silence  
The better it will be.  
The sooner we admit our crimes to others,  
To other peoples, creeds, genders, species,  
The better and lighter the human  
Future will be.  
The more we deny, the greater will be the horrors  
And vengeance of time  
That wait silently in the wings  
Of the bloody drama of our future

.  
Many beautiful thoughts have not yet sprouted  
In our deepest hearts and minds,  
Though they have lain there, within us,  
Lain waiting for thousands of years.  
The heart of humanity can  
Sometimes be a stony ground indeed.  
We speak the good words,  
But do not live them.  
We perform the beautiful rituals,  
But don't embody them.  
We praise our capacity for reason,  
But are unreasonably intolerant  
Of other people's validity, and reasons.  
We deploy the finest attributes  
Of the mind and spirit  
To make ourselves the elect  
And to cast our fellow travellers  
On this earth into outer darkness.

What a wonder is humanity:  
How marvellous its astonishing gift  
For hypocrisy.

II  
How healthy is the human race?  
When the foot is swollen, the kidney ailing,  
The neck stiff, the spirit troubled,  
The heartbeat irregular, the head stuffy,  
The thoughts narrow and negative,  
But the whole taken together  
Generally functional,  
Can we say that the body is healthy?  
So it is with humanity.

These are some of the illnesses of the race:  
Tyranny, starvation, religious and tribal wars,  
Repression, poverty, alienation, genocide,  
Indifference, xenophobia, illiteracy,  
Bad governments, epidemics, selfishness.  
We must face the fact that  
Given the whole picture  
The human race is not that well.

We have also, it cannot be denied,  
Accomplished great feats.  
We have journeyed to space and spied  
On the solitude of uninhabited planets.  
We have created mighty secular  
And religious structures,  
Made fabulous technological inventions,  
Found cures for horrible diseases,  
Solved some riddles of human genetics,  
Probed the mysteries of the weather,  
Shed light on aberrations of the mind,

Exploded the possibilities of communications,  
And tapped the awesome ambiguous  
Power of nuclear energy.  
And yet, because of our pollutions,  
Earth's fragile balance is askew.  
Humanity dies in refugee camps,  
Goes mad in ghettos,  
Is brutalised by bad governments,  
And perishes in festering wars.

And yet hatreds boil away  
For reasons of history  
And for different interpretations  
Of the same sacred texts  
That preach universal love.

We are amazing:  
So much gold has been revealed  
In the human spirit.  
So many wonderful philosophies  
Of startling simplicity  
Have been dreamt up and shared  
Amongst us,  
And yet we still live  
As if in Plato's cave,  
Watching the shadows  
Of sufferings go past  
As if they had nothing to do with us.  
And yet we live as if these thoughts,  
These dreams, these philosophies,  
Had not been uttered,  
And never been beneficial.

I contend that the human race  
Has not yet reached  
The true condition of civilization.

Sure, the quality of life has been enriched  
For many over the past centuries;  
But true civilisation is much more  
Than the technological progress  
Or well-being of part of the human race.

What we have called civilisations  
Are merely stages on the way  
To true world civilisation.

## **FIVE: Harmony of politics and heart**

*I*

Mastery of material problems:  
No spiritual way can reconcile  
Itself truthfully with the raw wound  
Of starving multitudes.  
We cannot use the word civilisation  
As long as people die of starvation.  
Those who do are cave-dwellers  
Of the mind.

Transmutation of world-wide poverty  
Will be the greatest alchemical  
Feat of the dreaming age.  
A basic pre-condition of civilisation  
Is a world free of hunger.  
Cannot be done by charity alone.

Symphony of rich and poor  
Nations of the earth.  
No them and us.  
No self-satisfaction.  
No superiority-thinking.  
Harmony of politics and heart.  
Rhythms of economics and art.  
Improvisations on the theme of justice:  
If the rich go on exploiting the poor  
We are talking about cannibalism.  
If the rich go on ignoring the poor  
Absolute violence will be the music  
To such deafness.  
With all our vaunted glories  
We are still largely humiliated  
Beings on earth.  
It's time we turned our formidable  
Powers of heart and mind  
To humanity's solvable problems —  
Problems which have become accusations.

This earth is our brief home.  
Let's put the human house in order  
Let's tend the wild garden of humanity.  
We are better than the sum total  
Of our successes and failures.  
The truth is that we haven't really tried,  
We haven't really gone for it,  
We haven't really striven  
For a world of balance  
And contentment.  
We are like athletes  
Who haven't really extended themselves.  
We haven't found out what we are  
Really capable of doing,  
If we put our minds to it.  
We are functioning below  
Our potential for love,  
Justice, and creating a good world.

### **SIX : Hold on to your sanity**

I  
At the end of powerful eras,  
And at the birth of new ones,  
Strange spirits spew up  
In the world, in nature,  
In the heavens, from our minds.  
Turbulences rise from secret places  
And underworlds of history,  
From our guilt and denial,  
From our wickedness and silence.  
From the oppressed and the suppressed.  
From our conscience.  
Great cries and monstrous visions  
Sound from humanity's  
Forgotten oracles.  
Visions of terminal horrors  
And eruptions.

The force of new eras  
Clashing with the old,  
Like two seas with two  
Contending powerful gods,  
Unleash things strange to behold.  
Collapsing structures multiply:  
Superstitions and anomie,

Paranoia and mindless cults,  
Conspiracy theories and supernatural  
Terrors, suicides and murders,  
Wars and fears and panic  
Wreak havoc on the world.  
And only those with substance,

Whose souls are earthed,  
Whose eyes are clear,  
Withstand it all.  
And they pay an awkward price  
For such clear-sightedness.  
They will be alone,  
But hopefully not as tragically  
Alone as the noble family  
In 'Satyricon' who, unable  
To bear such sanity  
In the midst of universal insanity,  
Elect for stoic suicide.

So watch your minds.  
Cling on to the soundest values.  
These are severely testing times ahead,  
More testing for the sane  
Than for those perfectly in tune  
With erupting contemporary anomie.

## II

For we are living on the cusp  
Of wonders and terrors.  
Tensions flow beneath the age  
Like great subterranean rivers.  
Never before has humanity,  
In such full consciousness,  
Drifted towards so momentous  
A moment in measured time.  
Minor spirits come out to play  
And create mischief at Halloween  
And on Walpurgis night.  
Major spirits might well be about  
In the slipstream of a new age.

And so hold on to the best  
Things of the awakened mind.  
Only the most solid and intangible  
Aspects of the human spirit  
Can save us from succumbing  
To the waves of panic  
That engulf us temporarily.

We need to become adaptive mariners.  
But when the waves pass,  
When the silver line has been crossed,  
And when we are safely over,  
A new calm will descend upon us.  
A profound time-change will settle  
On us as we find ourselves  
Not in a new land

But in a new time,  
A new space.  
And at first we will seem adrift  
On a strange sea where fishes  
No longer resemble what they used to be,  
And where we are no longer  
What we were,  
Or thought we were.  
And we will have become less,  
Or more,

Depending on what we have  
Brought with us  
From the old time,  
The old space.

Now is the moment to choose  
What we are going to freight over.  
We are going to need our sanity later.  
It will have been tempered  
And raised to such a pitch  
That out of its higher power  
Will come the next stage  
Of the evolution  
Of human consciousness.  
A higher history.  
The foundations of a new  
Universal civilization

### **SEVEN: No one is a loser**

I  
Our future is greater than our past.  
So far we have mostly misapplied  
The powers of the mind.  
We have under-applied  
The wonders of the human spirit.  
The mind that created pyramids,  
Warfare, great art, and science,  
Has not yet reached maturity.  
Everything we have done till now  
Merely suggests the power of the human  
Mind in its infancy.

We are not defined by our failures.  
Rivers have changed their courses.  
There are revolutions in the heavens,  
Among the stars, all the time.  
New worlds are constantly being born.  
What we call civilisation  
Is only ten years old  
In the mind of an oak tree,  
And a minute old  
To a distant star.  
Tradition doesn't have to weigh us down.  
We weigh ourselves down with tradition,  
With the past, with past failures,  
Past forms, past perceptions.  
We have made these things,  
We can unmake them.  
Every now and again the earth breaks  
Its crust, and molten liquid  
In its depths spews out,  
Turns to rocks, and forms new islands.  
The mind of humanity is such a force.  
New worlds wait to be created  
By free minds that can dream unfettered,  
Without fear, turning obstacles  
Into milestones towards luminous glories.  
The new age is such a time  
For such new births.  
We can all re-dream the world, our lives.  
But the conception must begin now.  
The birth must begin now.  
We should consecrate ourselves  
To clearing the deadwood and stale thinking  
And backward perceptions from our minds.  
We should begin to think anew.

To prepare ourselves for a new air,  
For a fuller future.  
The preparation would be rewarding,  
For we are each one of us saviours  
And co-makers of the world we live in.  
But we should begin now, here,  
Among one another,  
And in solitude.

## II

We must not think ourselves victims,  
Disadvantaged, held back —  
Because of race, colour, creed,  
Education, class, gender,  
Religion, height, or age.  
The world is not made of labels.  
The world, from now on,  
Will be made through the mind.  
Through great dreaming, great loving  
And masterly application.  
Those who transcend their apparent limitations  
Are greater than those who apparently  
Have little to transcend.  
Our handicaps can be the seed of our glories.  
We shouldn't deny them.  
We should embrace them,  
Embrace our marginalisation,  
Our invisibility, our powerlessness.  
Embrace our handicaps, and use them,  
And go beyond them,  
For they could well be the key  
To some of the most beautiful energies  
That we have been given.  
Accept no limitations to our human potential.  
We have the power of solar systems  
In our minds.  
Our rage is powerful.  
Our love is mighty.  
Our desire to survive is awesome.  
Our quest for freedom is noble, and great.

And just as astonishing is the knowledge  
That we are, more or less,  
The makers of the future.  
We create what time will frame.  
And a beautiful dream, shaped  
And realised by a beautiful mind,  
Is one of the greatest gifts  
We can make to our fellow beings.

## III

Never again will we stand  
On the threshold of a new age.  
We that are here now are touched  
In some mysterious way  
With the ability to change  
And make the future.  
Those who wake to the wonder  
Of this magic moment,  
Who wake to the possibilities  
Of this charged conjunction,  
Are the chosen ones who have chosen  
To act, to free the future, to open it up,  
To consign prejudices to the past,  
To open up the magic casement  
Of the human spirit  
Onto a more shining world.

Then, a few centuries into the future,  
The miseries and the sufferings  
Of continents will be the rumours  
Of history;  
There will be no famines  
No mass starvation  
No tolerance of tyranny  
And liberty will have a more glorious song.  
And then humanity will spend  
Time's repletion dreaming of ways  
To use the new freedoms and powers  
Of the race for higher things,  
Much as we find better uses  
For electricity or solar energy.

### **EIGHT: Turn on your light**

I

Do I see you recoil from such a vision?  
Have we become so neck-deep  
In cynicism that we threaten the race  
With an ever-descending spiral  
Of failure, inaction, negativity,  
Indifference, boredom, and stupidity?  
Cynicism only creates dead worlds;  
Its symbol, devoid of beauty,  
Is a dead land, where nothing grows.  
That is not the smarter side  
Of the human spirit, (as some would like to think),  
But the smaller, meaner, least attractive,  
The most death-encouraging side,  
And the least effective.

We are better than that.  
We are greater than our despair.  
The negative aspects of humanity  
Are not the most real and authentic;  
The most authentic thing about us  
Is our capacity to create, to overcome,  
To endure, to transform, to love,  
And to be greater than our suffering.  
We are best defined by the mystery  
That we are still here, and can still rise  
Upwards, still create better civilisations,  
That we can face our raw realities,  
And that we will survive  
The greater despair  
That the greater future might bring.

II

The new era is already here:  
Here the new time begins anew.  
The new era happens every day,  
Every day is a new world,  
A new calendar.  
All great moments, all great eras,  
Are just every moment  
And every day writ large.  
Thousands of years of loving, failing, killing,  
Creating, surprising, oppressing,  
And thinking ought now to start  
To bear fruit, to deliver their rich harvest.  
Will you be at the harvest,  
Among the gatherers of new fruits?  
Then you must begin today to remake  
Your mental and spiritual world,

And join the warriors and celebrants  
Of freedom, realisers of great dreams.

You can't remake the world  
Without remaking yourself.  
Each new era begins within.  
It is an inward event,  
With unsuspected possibilities  
For inner liberation.  
We could use it to turn on  
Our inward lights.  
We could use it to use even the dark  
And negative things positively.  
We could use the new era  
To clean our eyes,  
To see the world differently,  
To see ourselves more clearly.  
Only free people can make a free world.  
Infect the world with your light.  
Help fulfill the golden prophecies.  
Press forward the human genius.  
Our future is greater than our past.

### III

Already, the future is converging with the past.  
Already the world is converging.  
The diverse ways of the world  
Will create wonderful new forms,  
Lovely cultural explosions  
In the centuries to come.  
Already I sense future forms of art,  
Of painting, sculpture, humour.  
Already I sense future novels,  
Plays, poems, dances.  
Already I sense the great orchestras  
If we are going to have some control  
Of humanity, a world symphony,  
A world jam, in which the diverse  
Genius of the human race -  
Its rich tapestry of differences -  
Will combine, weave, heighten,  
Harmonise all its varied ways  
And bring about a universal flowering  
In all the vast numbers of disciplines  
And among the unnumbered peoples.  
Already I can hear this distant music  
Of the future  
The magic poetry of time,  
The distillation of all our different gifts.

It is all in the air.  
It is all gathering in the underground  
Coming together majestically.  
We should listen to the things  
Forming in the air  
On the spirit of the age  
The things forming in the underground  
We should do some deep serious working  
On the spirit of the age  
If we are going to bring about  
A marvelous future  
If we are going to have some control  
On how the unknown will affect us,  
The air must be altered  
The under-ground must be understood  
For the over-ground to be different.

Already I can hear this distant music

This distant music of the future  
Haunts me.

And I think it will be something  
Amazing to hear,  
A delight to the gods,  
Provided we don't lose our way ,  
More than we already have,  
And provided we are guided  
By our deepest love,  
The love that connects us all  
On this little globe of beauty.

IV

And because we have too much information,  
And no clear direction,  
Too many facts,  
And not enough faith,  
Too much confusion,  
And crave clear vision,  
Too many fears,  
And not enough light —  
I whisper to myself modest maxims  
As thought-friends for a new age.  
See clearly, think clearly.  
Face pleasant and unpleasant truths,  
Face reality.  
Free the past.  
Catch up with ourselves.  
Never cease from upward striving.  
We are better than we think.  
Don't be afraid to love, or be loved.  
As within, so without.  
We owe life abundant happiness.

V

The illusion of time will give way  
To the reality of time . . .  
And time present is made  
Before time becomes present.  
For all time is here, now,  
In our awakening.

VI

For, after the gospels,  
After the human and divine comedies,  
After the one thousand and one nights,  
After crime and punishment,  
War and peace, pride and prejudice,  
The sound and the fury,  
Between good and evil,  
Being and nothingness,  
After the tempest, the trial,  
And the wasteland,  
After things have fallen apart,  
After the hundred years of solitude,  
And the remembrance of things past,  
In the kingdom of this world,  
We can still astonish the gods in humanity  
And be the stuff of future legends,  
If we but dare to be real,  
And have the courage to see  
That this is the time to dream  
The best dream of them all.

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Ben Okri, 1959 - Nigerian novelist, Ben Okri was born in Minna. After his birth, his family moved to England so his father could study law. At the age of seven, his family returned to Nigeria and his father practised in Lagos. His childhood was influenced by the Nigerian civil war. He was constantly being withdrawn from schools so most of his education was at home. After failing to be placed in a university, Okri began writing articles on social and political issues. Most of them were not published, but he began writing short stories based on these articles and they began finding their way into women's journals and evening papers.

In 1978, he moved back to England where he studied comparative literature at Essex University but was forced to leave without a degree because of a lack of funds. He was a poetry editor of West Africa and worked also for the BBC. At nineteen, he finished his first novel "Flowers and Shadows" and it was published in 1980. The story attacked corruption in newly independent Nigeria and tells of a successful businessman whose jealous relatives make his life difficult.

Okri's second novel, "The Landscapes Within" (1981), traces the adventures of a young, poor painter in Lagos. This novel was followed by two collections of short stories, "Incidents at the Shrine" (1986), and "Starts of the New Curfew" (1988). Several of the stories tell of the Biafran War from a child's eyes. The novel "The Famished Road" (1991) tells the story of a character who must choose between the pain of mortality and the land of the spirits. Okri's next novel, "Songs of Enchantment" (1993), continued with the mythical and poetical view of the world. "An African Elegy" (1992), is a collection of poems with classical themes.

Okri has won several awards, which include the Booker Prize (1991), the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Africa (1987), the Paris Review Aga Khan prize for fiction, the Chianti Rufino-Antico Fattore International Literary Prize, and the Premio Grinzane Cavour.

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