

Howard's Zen

ACTOR **TERRENCE HOWARD** EXTOLS THE VIRTUES OF ABSTINENCE, SELF-LOVE, AND, UM, BABY WIPES



2005 was extraordinary for Terrence Howard—not only was there an Oscar nomination for playing a streetwalker's dream employer in *Hustle & Flow* and critical hosannas for his role as *Crash's* harassed director, there was also a storybook recoupling with his ex-wife and mother of his three kids. Two years later, the 38-year-old's career thrives—this month Howard plays the cop trying to cool Jodie Foster's vigilante tendencies in *The Brave One*. And that happy family reunion? We'll let Ol' Hazel Eyes field that one.—ANDREW GOLDMAN

ELLE: Please share your most humiliating experience from adolescence.

TERRENCE HOWARD: When I was younger, I had a girlfriend I was absolutely in love with. I was a goody-goody boy and wasn't ready to have sex with her. So she went to a party in Buffalo, got drunk, some guys got ahold of her, and she experienced some stuff.

ELLE: By "stuff" you mean going off with two guys at once?

TH: Oh, it was more than that. It was a few. She had a party.

ELLE: Yikes. How did you find out?

TH: She told me. Then, when she was breaking up with me, I remember crying on the phone, and she put me on loudspeaker and she and her friends laughed about it.

ELLE: Nice girl. What does your ideal woman look like?

TH: I like women who look like me. Generally, you're attracted to women who look like you, because the most beautiful thing in nature is your own reflection.

ELLE: So...you like a lady with a pencil moustache?

TH: No, but a woman who shares my features.

ELLE: You also once described your dad and uncle as "pimps" who taught you how to communicate with women. What did they tell you?

TH: They were just pimps in the figurative sense, in that they were both very worldly with women. They taught me that in every relationship, the person least interested in maintaining it is going to dominate it, because they'll never compromise. So you have to always maintain that position of least interest, and you'll always control the relationship.

ELLE: Were they right?

TH: I practiced that during my wild years. But it was unfulfilling because you never give, because you never need to. And then the other person goes on to a happy life because they were able to give and cry while you never opened up.

ELLE: Why have most of your relationships ended?

TH: My unwillingness to commit. I was always trying to convince myself that I was with the right person when I wasn't. And sex ends up masking your real feelings because you're able to get some satisfaction, when what you really need is a lifetime partner and friend. If a relationship is built on sexuality, it won't last long.

ELLE: So do you have a new approach to make sure this doesn't happen?

TH: Now I'm completely chaste through a relationship unless I get married. I don't believe in premarital sex. It enabled me to date three or four women at the same time, because as long as I wasn't having sex with them, I could always just walk away.

ELLE: So are there many women out there wondering, "Why didn't Terrence ever have sex with me?"

TH: Yeah, but early on, I'd explain to them, "If we have sex, it's going to kill this thing." There were some who pushed for sex, and sometimes they won. Afterward, I would feel unclean, like I'd compromised my own values. So I would have to let them go because they didn't help me be a stronger person.

ELLE: What one item could you find in a woman's house that would prove that you weren't compatible?

TH: Toilet paper—and no baby wipes—in her bathroom.

ELLE: Wait. I don't think I understand.

TH: If they're using dry paper, they aren't washing all of themselves. It's just unclean. So if I go inside a woman's house and see the toilet paper there, I'll explain this. And if she doesn't make the adjustment to baby wipes, I'll know she's not completely clean.

ELLE: You were married very young, got divorced, and then spent years trying to get your ex back, got together again a few years ago, but are now apart. What happened?

TH: I realized why she divorced me in the first place. I was in love with her, but she was not in love with me. I can't be upset because she doesn't find me the most beautiful thing on the planet. But I don't look much like her, so I understand that.

ELLE: Do you think her not being in love with you had anything to do with your cheating when you were first married?

TH: Yeah, I'm sure lack of trust, lack of fidelity did. But I guess we all have to go through that at times.

ELLE: What's the angriest you've ever seen a woman?

TH: When you see a woman go in the kitchen and get a knife, that's pretty angry.

ELLE: You think she was prepared to use it?

TH: I didn't stick around long enough to find out.