

# Alan Watts

*Lectures and Essays*



Alan Watts (1915-1973) who held both a master's degree in theology and a doctorate of divinity, is best known as an interpreter of Zen Buddhism in particular, and Indian and Chinese philosophy in general. He authored more than 20 *excellent* books on the philosophy and psychology of religion, and lectured extensively, leaving behind a vast audio archive. With characteristic lucidity and humor Watts unravels the most obscure ontological and epistemological knots with the greatest of ease.

## Bibliography

Inability to accept the mystic experience is more than an intellectual handicap. *Lack of awareness of the basic unity of organism and environment is a serious and dangerous hallucination.* For in a civilization equipped with immense technological power, the sense of alienation between man and nature leads to the use of technology in a hostile spirit---to the "conquest" of nature instead of intelligent co-operation with nature. Alan Watts, *Psychedelics and Religious Experience*

During his life Alan Watts spoke at length to the public through books, lectures and non-commercial radio broadcasts on the ways and means to spiritual liberation. It is clear that he intended to influence the widest possible audience with this honorable message aimed at improving our understanding of the world and our behavior towards it and each other. These materials are provided to you in that spirit of goodwill for non-profit academic research and spiritual teaching purposes.

"To extend the idea of 'personal property' to include teachings which have as their object the liberation of the human spirit from selfish myopia, the awakening to states of consciousness which apprehend the essential identity of the self and its transcendent essence, seems very contradictory if not simply wrong, maybe even 'evil'." Tom Simons

- [Let's talk with Alan Watts!](#) realaudio
- [Weekly Netcast Schedule](#)

## Lectures

These lectures are transcripts of recordings made from [non-commercial radio broadcasts](#). They are fairly complete with some inevitable errors in spelling, grammar, and minor tape break omissions. Alan Watts was a highly-skilled lecturer so these files should not be considered acceptable substitutes for the original audio recordings. Unless [you don't understand english](#) or have hearing impairment, these files can only serve as the barest introduction to his oral talent.

The subject of this seminar is "Self and Other," and this is therefore to be an exploration into the subject that interests me most, which is the problem of personal identity, man's relationship to the universe, and all the things that are connected with that. It is for our culture at this time in history an extremely urgent problem, because of our technological power. In known history, nobody has had such capacity for altering the universe than the people of the United States of America, and nobody has gone about it in such an aggressive way.

### [Self and Other](#)

I find it a little difficult to say what the subject matter of this seminar is going to be, because it's too fundamental to give it a title. I'm going to talk about what there is. Now the first thing that we have to do is to get our perspectives with some background about the basic ideas that, as Westerners living today in the United States, influence our everyday common sense, our fundamental notions about what life is about. And there are historical origins for this which influence us more strongly than most people realize. Ideas of the world which are built into the very nature of the language we use, and of our ideas of logic, and of what makes sense altogether.

### [The Nature of Consciousness](#)

Part 1 and most of 2 (of 3) are also known as "What Is Reality?"

Playing at Pin Up Casino in Russia for real money is possible only after registration and making a deposit to the account. But for the convenience of its customers, the Pinap gambling club has provided for the possibility of a free game in demo mode. Thanks to this solution, users have a great opportunity to try out different game slots, decide which machine suits them best and only after that start betting.

Today, serious heresy, and rather peculiarly in the United States, is a deviant state of consciousness. Not so much deviant opinions as having a kind of experience which is different from "regular" experience. And as Ronald Lang..has so well pointed out, we are taught what experiences are permissible in the same way we are taught what gestures, what manners, what behavior is permissible and socially acceptable. And therefore, if a person has so-called "strange" experiences, and endeavors to communicate these experiences, because naturally one talks about what one feels, and endeavors to communicate these experiences to other people, he is looked at in a very odd way and asked "are you feeling all right?" Because people feel distinctly uncomfortable when they realize they are in the presence of someone who is experiencing the world in a rather different way from themselves. They call in question as to whether this person is indeed human. They look like a human being but because the state of experience is so different you wonder whether they really are. And you get the kind of.. the same kind of queasy feeling inside as you would get if, for example, you were to encounter a very beautiful girl, very formally dressed, and you were introduced, and in order to shake hands she removed her glove and you found in your hand the claw of a large bird. That would be spooky, wouldn't it?

## The Value of Psychotic Experience

This weekend seminar is devoted to Buddhism .. The center of Buddhism, the only really important thing about Buddhism is the experience which they call 'awakening.' Buddha is a title, and not a proper name. It means "awake".

## The World As Emptiness

It would be, of course, much better, if this occasion were celebrated with no talk at all, and if I addressed you in the manner of the ancient teachers of Zen, I should hit the microphone with my fan and leave. But I somehow have the feeling that since you have contributed to the support of the Zen Center, in expectation of learning something, a few words should be said, even though I warn you, that by explaining these things to you, I shall subject you to a very serious hoax.

## A Lecture on Zen

(aka Zen Bones)

# Essays

The undoubted mystical and religious intent of most users of the psychedelics, even if some of these substances should be proved injurious to physical health, requires that their free and responsible use be exempt from legal restraint in any republic that maintains a constitutional separation of church and state. To the extent that mystical experience conforms with the tradition of genuine religious involvement, and to the extent that psychedelics induce that experience, users are entitled to some constitutional protection. Also, to the extent that research in the psychology of religion can utilize such drugs, students of the human mind must be free to use them. Under present laws, I, as an experienced student of the psychology of religion, can no longer pursue research in the field. This is a barbarous restriction of spiritual and intellectual freedom, suggesting that the legal system of the United States is, after all, in tacit alliance with the monarchical theory of the universe, and will, therefore, prohibit and persecute religious ideas and practices based on an organic and unitary vision of the universe.

## Psychedelics and Religious Experience

It is said that playing-cards were devised by the ancients to hide a secret where those not "in the know" would never think of looking for it. For heresy-hunters are serious-minded people who would never think of looking for religion in a game. It is curious to think how men have gambled, fought and slain one another over these unknown symbols, and it is interesting to wonder whether the most accomplished 'poker face' would fall a little on discovering that he was playing for lucre with emblems just as holy as the cross, the chalice and the crown of thorns. Probably not, for men have done things just as terrible in the name of symbols whose holiness they recognized. However, it is no less strange that the puritanic mind should see in diamonds, spades, hearts and clubs the signs of vice, to be avoided at all times and more especially on Sundays.

## The Cross of Cards

### **I wish I was there!**

- [The Houseboat Summit featuring Timothy Leary, Gary Snyder, Alan Watts and Allen Ginsberg](#)

# Network Resources

- **Weekly Netcast Lectures!** You may wish to grab a pen and paper and jot down a localized hard copy of this schedule corrected for your timezone.
  - **Sunday**
    - [KKUP](#) - Pacific Time
      - mornings from 7-8am - [realaudio](#)
    - [WUOG](#) - Eastern Time
      - mornings from 10-10:30am - [realaudio8](#)
  - **Monday**
    - [KPFK](#) - Pacific Time
      - nights from 11pm-Midnight - [realaudio](#)
  - **Tuesday**
    - [KGNU](#) - Mountain Time
      - mornings from 9-9:30am - [realaudio](#)
  - **Wednesday**
    - [WMNF](#) - Eastern Time
      - mornings 11-11:30pm - [realaudio](#)
  - **Thursday**
    - [WFMU](#) - Eastern Time
      - [evenings 6-7pm](#) - [realaudio](#) or [winmedia](#)
  - **Friday**
    - [KPFK](#) - Pacific Time
      - mornings from Midnight-1am - [realaudio](#)
  - **Saturday**
    - [WGDR](#) - Eastern Time
      - mornings from 11:30am-12:30pm - [realaudio](#) or [winamp](#)
    - [Alan Watts Discussion Forum](#) posts weekly details about upcoming netcasts including which lectures to expect and when shows are pre-empted by fundraising or other shows.
    - [Table of Alan Watts Radio Broadcasts in U.S. Cities](#)
- **Audio**
  - [Alan Watts Sound Bytes](#) at wattstapes.com
  - [Alan Watts: Real Audio](#) at alanwatts.com

- [Learning the Human Game](#) clip
- CBC Radio IDEAS 1974 - [realaudio/index](#)  
5 min Alan Watts segment begins between 32-33 minutes into this 54 min show.
- **Songs**
  - **[Joy Zipper](#)**
    - 10. The Power Of Alan Watts - [real](#) or [winmedia](#)
  - **Van Morrison**
    - [Lyrics for Alan Watts Blues](#)
- **Essays**
  - [The New Alchemy](#)
- **Books**
  - [The Joyous Cosmology](#)
  - [The Book On The Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are](#)
- **Community**
  - [AlanWatts.net](#)
    - [Alan Watts Discussion Forum](#) and Java [Alan Watts Chat](#)
  - [AlanWatts Group](#) is a place to study and discuss the teachings of Alan Watts.

## Bring your wallet

- [Mastering Enlightenments Arts](#) reportedly provides complete versions of Alan Watts lectures.
- [Alan Watts Electronic University](#) reportedly provides edited versions of Alan Watts lectures as well as rare books, pamphlets and realaudio clips.
- [Big Sur Tapes](#) has rare and unusual audio and print items.
- Videocollection, [Four by Alan Watts](#)
- Hartley Film Foundation, [ZEN: The Best of Alan Watts](#), and [The Art of Meditation](#).
- [Mystic Fire Video](#) has *edited* videos and audio. Click 'catalog' then search for 'watts'.
- [The Pacifica Radio Archives](#) contain several rare radio broadcasts.
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- [This message](#) contains information concerning the integrity of various commercial offerings of Alan Watts lectures. Unfortunately these important spiritual teachings are subject to commercial exploitation and often edited, retitled and repackaged. Do some research before you spend!



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## Books

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The Legacy of Asia and Western Man	1939
The Meaning of Happiness	1940
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The Supreme Identity	1950
The Wisdom of Insecurity	1951
Myth and Ritual in Christianity	1953
The Way of Zen	1957
Nature, Man, and Woman	1958
This Is It	1960
Psychotherapy East and West	1961
The Joyous Cosmology	1962
The Two Hands of God	1963
Beyond Theology	1964
The Book On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are	1966
Nonsense	1967
Does It Matter?	1970
Erotic Spirituality	1971
The Art of Contemplation	1972
In My Own Way (autobiography)	1972
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Tao: The Watercourse Way	1975

## Monographs and Pamphlets

An Outline of Zen Buddhism	1932
Seven Symbols of Life	1936

The Psychology of Acceptance	1939
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Om: The Sound of Hinduism	1967
Why Not Now: Dhyana, The Art of Meditation	1969

This bibliography doesn't include the numerous books of essays and lecture transcripts published after his death.

[Alan Watts](#) at [deoxy.org](#)

# Psychedelics and Religious Experience

by Alan Watts

1. The Psychedelic Experience
  - a. slowing down of time
  - b. awareness of polarity
  - c. awareness of relativity
  - d. awareness of eternal energy
2. Opposition to Psychedelic Drugs
  - a. danger
  - b. escape from reality
3. Footnotes

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The experiences resulting from the use of psychedelic drugs are often described in religious terms. They are therefore of interest to those like myself who, in the tradition of William James,<sup>[1]</sup> are concerned with the psychology of religion. For more than thirty years I have been studying the causes, the consequences, and the conditions of those peculiar states of consciousness in which the individual discovers himself to be one continuous process with God, with the Universe, with the Ground of Being, or whatever name he may use by cultural conditioning or personal preference for the ultimate and eternal reality. We have no satisfactory and definitive name for experiences of this kind. The terms "religious experience," "mystical experience," and "cosmic consciousness" are all too vague and comprehensive to denote that specific mode of consciousness which, to those who have known it, is as real and overwhelming as falling in love. This article describes such states of consciousness induced by psychedelic drugs, although they are virtually indistinguishable from genuine mystical experience. The article then discusses objections to the use of psychedelic drugs that arise mainly from the opposition between mystical values and the traditional religious and secular values of Western society.

## The Psychedelic Experience

The idea of mystical experiences resulting from drug use is not readily accepted in Western societies. Western culture has, historically, a particular fascination with the value and virtue of man as an individual, self-determining, responsible ego, controlling himself and his world by the power of conscious effort and will. Nothing, then, could be more repugnant to this cultural tradition than the notion of spiritual or psychological growth through the use of drugs. A "drugged" person is by definition dimmed in consciousness, fogged in judgment, and deprived of will. But not all psychotropic (consciousness-changing) chemicals are

narcotic and soporific, as are alcohol, opiates, and barbiturates. The effects of what are now called psychedelic (mind-manifesting) chemicals differ from those of alcohol as laughter differs from rage, or delight from depression. There is really no analogy between being "high" on LSD and "drunk" on bourbon. True, no one in either state should drive a car, but neither should one drive while reading a book, playing a violin, or making love. Certain creative activities and states of mind demand a concentration and devotion that are simply incompatible with piloting a death-dealing engine along a highway.

I myself have experimented with five of the principal psychedelics: LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, dimethyl-tryptamine (DMT), and cannabis. I have done so, as William James tried nitrous oxide, to see if they could help me in identifying what might be called the "essential" or "active" ingredients of the mystical experience. For almost all the classical literature on mysticism is vague, not only in describing the experience, but also in showing rational connections between the experience itself and the various traditional methods recommended to induce it: fasting, concentration, breathing exercises, prayers, incantations, and dances. A traditional master of Zen or Yoga, when asked why such-and-such practices lead or predispose one to the mystical experience, always responds, "This is the way my teacher gave it to me. This is the way I found out. If you're seriously interested, try it for yourself." This answer hardly satisfies an impertinent, scientifically minded, and intellectually curious Westerner. It reminds him of archaic medical prescriptions compounding five salamanders, powdered gallows rope, three boiled bats, a scruple of phosphorus, three pinches of henbane, and a dollop of dragon dung dropped when the moon was in Pisces. Maybe it worked, but what was the essential ingredient?

It struck me, therefore, that if any of the psychedelic chemicals would in fact predispose my consciousness to the mystical experience, I could use them as instruments for studying and describing that experience as one uses a microscope for bacteriology, even though the microscope is an "artificial" and "unnatural" contrivance which might be said to "distort" the vision of the naked eye. However, when I was first invited to test the mystical qualities of LSD-25 by Dr. Keith Ditman of the Neuropsychiatric Clinic at UCLA Medical School, I was unwilling to believe that any mere chemical could induce a genuine mystical experience. At most, it might bring about a state of spiritual insight analogous to swimming with water wings. Indeed, my first experiment with LSD-25 was not mystical. It was an intensely interesting aesthetic and intellectual experience that challenged my powers of analysis and careful description to the utmost.

Some months later, in 1959, I tried LSD-25 again with Drs. Sterling Bunnell and Michael Agron, who were then associated with the Langley-Porter Clinic, in San Francisco. In the course of two experiments I was amazed and somewhat embarrassed to find myself going through states of consciousness that corresponded precisely with every description of major mystical experiences that I had ever read.<sup>[2]</sup> Furthermore, they exceeded both in depth and in a peculiar quality of unexpectedness the three "natural and spontaneous" experiences of this kind that had happened to me in previous years.

Through subsequent experimentation with LSD-25 and the other chemicals named above (with the exception of DMT, which I find amusing but relatively uninteresting), I found I could move with ease into the state of "cosmic consciousness," and in due course became

less and less dependent on the chemicals themselves for "tuning in" to this particular wave length of experience. Of the five psychedelics tried, I found that LSD-25 and cannabis suited my purposes best. Of these two, the latter--cannabis--which I had to use abroad in countries where it is not outlawed, proved to be the better. It does not induce bizarre alterations of sensory perception, and medical studies indicate that it may not, save in great excess, have the dangerous side effects of LSD.

For the purposes of this study, in describing my experiences with psychedelic drugs I avoid the occasional and incidental bizarre alterations of sense perception that psychedelic chemicals may induce. I am concerned, rather, with the fundamental alterations of the normal, socially induced consciousness of one's own existence and relation to the external world. I am trying to delineate the basic principles of psychedelic awareness. But I must add that I can speak only for myself. The quality of these experiences depends considerably upon one's prior orientation and attitude to life, although the now voluminous descriptive literature of these experiences accords quite remarkably with my own.

Almost invariably, my experiments with psychedelics have had four dominant characteristics. I shall try to explain them--in the expectation that the reader will say, at least of the second and third, "Why, that's obvious! No one needs a drug to see that." Quite so, but every insight has degrees of intensity. There can be obvious-1 and obvious-2, and the latter comes on with shattering clarity, manifesting its implications in every sphere and dimension of our existence.

The first characteristic is a slowing down of time, a *concentration in the present*. One's normally compulsive concern for the future decreases, and one becomes aware of the enormous importance and interest of what is happening at the moment. Other people, going about their business on the streets, seem to be slightly crazy, failing to realize that the whole point of life is to be fully aware of it as it happens. One therefore relaxes, almost luxuriously, into studying the colors in a glass of water, or in listening to the now highly articulate vibration of every note played on an oboe or sung by a voice.

From the pragmatic standpoint of our culture, such an attitude is very bad for business. It might lead to improvidence, lack of foresight, diminished sales of insurance policies, and abandoned savings accounts. Yet this is just the corrective that our culture needs. No one is more fatuously impractical than the "successful" executive who spends his whole life absorbed in frantic paper work with the objective of retiring in comfort at sixty-five, when it will all be too late. Only those who have cultivated the art of living completely in the present have any use for making plans for the future, for when the plans mature they will be able to enjoy the results. "Tomorrow never comes." I have never yet heard a preacher urging his congregation to practice that section of the Sermon on the Mount which begins, "Be not anxious for the morrow...." The truth is that people who live for the future are, as we say of the insane, "not quite all there"--or here: by over-eagerness they are perpetually missing the point. Foresight is bought at the price of anxiety, and when overused it destroys all its own advantages.

The second characteristic I will call *awareness of polarity*. This is the vivid realization that states, things, and events that we ordinarily call opposite are interdependent, like back and

front, or the poles of a magnet. By polar awareness one sees that things which are explicitly different are implicitly one: self and other, subject and object, left and right, male and female--and then, a little more surprisingly, solid and space, figure and background, pulse and interval, saints and sinners, police and criminals, in-groups and out-groups. Each is definable only in terms of the other, and they go together transactionally, like buying and selling, for there is no sale without a purchase, and no purchase without a sale. As this awareness becomes increasingly intense, you feel that you yourself are polarized with the external universe in such a way that you imply each other. Your push is its pull, and its push is your pull--as when you move the steering wheel of a car. Are you pushing it or pulling it?

At first, this is a very odd sensation, not unlike hearing your own voice played back to you on an electronic system immediately after you have spoken. You become confused, and wait for *it* to go on! Similarly, you feel that you are something being done by the universe, yet that the universe is equally something being done by you--which is true, at least in the neurological sense that the peculiar structure of our brains translates the sun into light, and air vibrations into sound. Our normal sensation of relationship to the outside world is that sometimes I push it, and sometimes it pushes me. But if the two are actually one, where does action begin and responsibility rest? If the universe is doing me, how can I be sure that, two seconds hence, I will still remember the English language? If I am doing it, how can I be sure that, two seconds hence, my brain will know how to turn the sun into light? From such unfamiliar sensations as these, the psychedelic experience can generate confusion, paranoia, and terror--even though the individual is feeling his relationship to the world exactly as it would be described by a biologist, ecologist, or physicist, for he is feeling himself as the unified field of organism and environment.

The third characteristic, arising from the second, is *awareness of relativity*. I see that I am a link in an infinite hierarchy of processes and beings, ranging from molecules through bacteria and insects to human beings, and, maybe, to angels and gods--a hierarchy in which every level is in effect the same situation. For example, the poor man worries about money while the rich man worries about his health: the worry is the same, but the difference is in its substance or dimension. I realize that fruit flies must think of themselves as people, because, like ourselves, they find themselves in the middle of their own world--with immeasurably greater things above and smaller things below. To us, they all look alike and seem to have no personality--as do the Chinese when we have not lived among them. Yet fruit flies must see just as many subtle distinctions among themselves as we among ourselves.

From this it is but a short step to the realization that all forms of life and being are simply variations on a single theme: we are all in fact one being doing the same thing in as many different ways as possible. As the French proverb goes, *plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose* (the more it varies, the more it is one). I see, further, that feeling threatened by the inevitability of death is really the same experience as feeling alive, and that as all beings are feeling this everywhere, they are all just as much "I" as myself. Yet the "I" feeling, to be felt at all, must always be a sensation relative to the "other"--to something beyond its control and experience. To be at all, it must begin and end. But the intellectual jump that mystical and psychedelic experiences make here is in enabling you to see that all these myriad I-centers are yourself--not, indeed, your personal and superficially conscious ego, but what Hindus call the *paramatman*, the Self of all selves.<sup>[3]</sup> As the retina enables us to see countless

pulses of energy as a single light, so the mystical experience shows us innumerable individuals as a single Self.

The fourth characteristic is *awareness of eternal energy*, often in the form of intense white light, which seems to be both the current in your nerves and that mysterious  $e$  which equals  $mc^2$ . This may sound like megalomania or delusion of grandeur-but one sees quite clearly that all existence is a single energy, and that this energy is one's own being. Of course there is death as well as life, because energy is a pulsation, and just as waves must have both crests and troughs, the experience of existing must go on and off. Basically, therefore, there is simply nothing to worry about, because you yourself are the eternal energy of the universe playing hide-and-seek (off-and-on) with itself. At root, you are the Godhead, for God is all that there is. Quoting Isaiah just a little out of context: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create the darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things."<sup>[4]</sup> This is the sense of the fundamental tenet of Hinduism, *Tat tram asi*--"THAT (i.e., "that subtle Being of which this whole universe is composed") art thou."<sup>[5]</sup> A classical case of this experience, from the West, is in Tennyson's Memoirs:

A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro' repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.<sup>[6]</sup>

Obviously, these characteristics of the psychedelic experience, as I have known it, are aspects of a single state of consciousness--for I have been describing the same thing from different angles. The descriptions attempt to convey the reality of the experience, but in doing so they also suggest some of the inconsistencies between such experience and the current values of society.

## Opposition to Psychedelic Drugs

Resistance to allowing use of psychedelic drugs originates in both religious and secular values. The difficulty in describing psychedelic experiences in traditional religious terms suggests one ground of opposition. The Westerner must borrow such words as *samadhi* or *moksha* from the Hindus, or *satori* or *kensho* from the Japanese, to describe the experience of oneness with the universe. We have no appropriate word because our own Jewish and Christian theologies will not accept the idea that man's inmost self can be identical with the Godhead, even though Christians may insist that this was true in the unique instance of Jesus Christ. Jews and Christians think of God in political and monarchical terms, as the supreme governor of the universe, the ultimate boss. Obviously, it is both socially unacceptable and logically preposterous for a particular individual to claim that he, in person, is the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of the world-to be accorded suitable recognition and honor.

Such an imperial and kingly concept of the ultimate reality, however, is neither necessary nor universal. The Hindus and the Chinese have no difficulty in conceiving of an identity of the self and the Godhead. For most Asians, other than Muslims, the Godhead moves and manifests the world in much the same way that a centipede manipulates a hundred legs-spontaneously, without deliberation or calculation. In other words, they conceive the universe by analogy with an organism as distinct from a mechanism. They do not see it as an artifact or construct under the conscious direction of some supreme technician, engineer, or architect.

If, however, in the context of Christian or Jewish tradition, an individual declares himself to be one with God, he must be dubbed blasphemous (subversive) or insane. Such a mystical experience is a clear threat to traditional religious concepts. The Judaeo-Christian tradition has a monarchical image of God, and monarchs, who rule by force, fear nothing more than insubordination. The Church has therefore always been highly suspicious of mystics, because they seem to be insubordinate and to claim equality or, worse, identity with God. For this reason, John Scotus Erigena and Meister Eckhart were condemned as heretics. This was also why the Quakers faced opposition for their doctrine of the Inward Light, and for their refusal to remove hats in church and in court. A few occasional mystics may be all right so long as they watch their language, like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, who maintained, shall we say, a metaphysical distance of respect between themselves and their heavenly King. Nothing, however, could be more alarming to the ecclesiastical hierarchy than a popular outbreak of mysticism, for this might well amount to setting up a democracy in the kingdom of heaven-and such alarm would be shared equally by Catholics, Jews, and fundamentalist Protestants.

The monarchical image of God, with its implicit distaste for religious insubordination, has a more pervasive impact than many Christians might admit. The thrones of kings have walls immediately behind them, and all who present themselves at court must prostrate themselves or kneel, because this is an awkward position from which to make a sudden attack. It has perhaps never occurred to Christians that when they design a church on the model of a royal court (basilica) and prescribe church ritual, they are implying that God, like a human monarch, is afraid. This is also implied by flattery in prayers:

O Lord our heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only Ruler of princes, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth: most heartily we beseech thee with thy favor to behold....<sup>[7]</sup>

The Western man who claims consciousness of oneness with God or the universe thus clashes with his society's concept of religion. In most Asian cultures, however, such a man will be congratulated as having penetrated the true secret of life. He has arrived, by chance or by some such discipline as Yoga or Zen meditation, at a state of consciousness in which he experiences directly and vividly what our own scientists know to be true in theory. For the ecologist, the biologist, and the physicist know (but seldom feel) that every organism constitutes a single field of behavior, or process, with its environment. There is no way of separating what any given organism is doing from what its environment is doing, for which reason ecologists speak not of organisms in environments but of organism-environments. Thus the words "I" and "self" should properly mean what the whole universe is doing at this

particular "here-and-now" called John Doe.

The kingly concept of God makes identity of self and God, or self and universe, inconceivable in Western religious terms. The difference between Eastern and Western concepts of man and his universe, however, extends beyond strictly religious concepts. The Western scientist may rationally perceive the idea of organism-environment, but he does not ordinarily feel this to be true. By cultural and social conditioning, he has been hypnotized into experiencing himself as an ego-as an isolated center of consciousness and will inside a bag of skin, confronting an external and alien world. We say, "I came into this world." But we did nothing of the kind. We came out of it in just the same way that fruit comes out of trees. Our galaxy, our cosmos, "peoples" in the same way that an apple tree "apples."

Such a vision of the universe clashes with the idea of a monarchical God, with the concept of the separate ego, and even with the secular, atheist/agnostic mentality, which derives its common sense from the mythology of nineteenth-century scientist. According to this view, the universe is a mindless mechanism and man a sort of accidental microorganism infesting a minute globular rock that revolves about an unimportant star on the outer fringe of one of the minor galaxies. This "put-down" theory of man is extremely common among such quasi scientists as sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, most of whom are still thinking of the world in terms of Newtonian mechanics, and have never really caught up with the ideas of Einstein and Bohr, Oppenheimer and Schrodinger. Thus to the ordinary institutional-type psychiatrist, any patient who gives the least hint of mystical or religious experience is automatically diagnosed as deranged. From the standpoint of the mechanistic religion, he is a heretic and is given electroshock therapy as an up-to-date form of thumbscrew and rack. And, incidentally, it is just this kind of quasi scientist who, as consultant to government and law-enforcement agencies, dictates official policies on the use of psychedelic chemicals.

Inability to accept the mystic experience is more than an intellectual handicap. Lack of awareness of the basic unity of organism and environment is a serious and dangerous hallucination. For in a civilization equipped with immense technological power, the sense of alienation between man and nature leads to the use of technology in a hostile spirit--to the "conquest" of nature instead of intelligent co-operation with nature. The result is that we are eroding and destroying our environment, spreading Los Angelization instead of civilization. This is the major threat overhanging Western, technological culture, and no amount of reasoning or doom-preaching seems to help. We simply do not respond to the prophetic and moralizing techniques of conversion upon which Jews and Christians have always relied. But people have an obscure sense of what is good for them--call it "unconscious self-healing," "survival instinct," "positive growth potential," or what you will. Among the educated young there is therefore a startling and unprecedented interest in the transformation of human consciousness. All over the Western world publishers are selling millions of books dealing with Yoga, Vedanta, Zen Buddhism, and the chemical mysticism of psychedelic drugs, and I have come to believe that the whole "hip" subculture, however misguided in some of its manifestations, is the earnest and responsible effort of young people to correct the self-destroying course of industrial civilization.

The content of the mystical experience is thus inconsistent with both the religious and secular concepts of traditional Western thought. Moreover, mystical experiences often result

in attitudes that threaten the authority not only of established churches, but also of secular society. Unafraid of death and deficient in worldly ambition, those who have undergone mystical experiences are impervious to threats and promises. Moreover, their sense of the relativity of good and evil arouses the suspicion that they lack both conscience and respect for law. Use of psychedelics in the United States by a literate bourgeoisie means that an important segment of the population is indifferent to society's traditional rewards and sanctions.

In theory, the existence within our secular society of a group that does not accept conventional values is consistent with our political vision. But one of the great problems of the United States, legally and politically, is that we have never quite had the courage of our convictions. The Republic is founded on the marvelously sane principle that a human community can exist and prosper only on a basis of mutual trust. Metaphysically, the American Revolution was a rejection of the dogma of Original Sin, which is the notion that because you cannot trust yourself or other people, there must be some Superior Authority to keep us all in order. The dogma was rejected because, if it is true that we cannot trust ourselves and others, it follows that we cannot trust the Superior Authority which we ourselves conceive and obey, and that the very idea of our own untrustworthiness is unreliable!

Citizens of the United States believe, or are supposed to believe, that a republic is the best form of government. Yet vast confusion arises from trying to be republican in politics and monarchist in religion. How can a republic be the best form of government if the universe, heaven, and hell are a monarchy?[8] Thus, despite the theory of government by consent, based upon mutual trust, the peoples of the United States retain, from the authoritarian backgrounds of their religions or national origins, an utterly naive faith in law as some sort of supernatural and paternalistic power. "There ought to be a law against it!" Our law-enforcement officers are therefore confused, hindered, and bewildered--not to mention corrupted--by being asked to enforce sumptuary laws, often of ecclesiastical origin, that vast numbers of people have no intention of obeying and that, in any case, are immensely difficult or simply impossible to enforce--for example, the barring of anything so undetectable as LSD-25 from international and interstate commerce.

Finally, there are two specific objections to use of psychedelic drugs. First, use of these drugs may be dangerous. However, every worth-while exploration is dangerous--climbing mountains, testing aircraft, rocketing into outer space, skin diving, or collecting botanical specimens in jungles. But if you value knowledge and the actual delight of exploration more than mere duration of uneventful life, you are willing to take the risks. It is not really healthy for monks to practice fasting, and it was hardly hygienic for Jesus to get himself crucified, but these are risks taken in the course of spiritual adventures. Today the adventurous young are taking risks in exploring the psyche, testing their mettle at the task just as, in times past, they have tested it--more violently--in hunting, dueling, hot-rod racing, and playing football. What they need is not prohibitions and policemen, but the most intelligent encouragement and advice that can be found.

Second, drug use may be criticized as an escape from reality. However, this criticism assumes unjustly that the mystical experiences themselves are escapist or unreal. LSD, in

particular, is by no means a soft and cushy escape from reality. It can very easily be an experience in which you have to test your soul against all the devils in hell. For me, it has been at times an experience in which I was at once completely lost in the corridors of the mind and yet relating that very lostness to the exact order of logic and language, simultaneously very mad and very sane. But beyond these occasional lost and insane episodes, there are the experiences of the world as a system of total harmony and glory, and the discipline of relating these to the order of logic and language must somehow explain how what William Blake called that "energy which is eternal delight" can consist with the misery and suffering of everyday life.[9]

The undoubted mystical and religious intent of most users of the psychedelics, even if some of these substances should be proved injurious to physical health, requires that their free and responsible use be exempt from legal restraint in any republic that maintains a constitutional separation of church and state.[10] To the extent that mystical experience conforms with the tradition of genuine religious involvement, and to the extent that psychedelics induce that experience, users are entitled to some constitutional protection. Also, to the extent that research in the psychology of religion can utilize such drugs, students of the human mind must be free to use them. Under present laws, I, as an experienced student of the psychology of religion, can no longer pursue research in the field. This is a barbarous restriction of spiritual and intellectual freedom, suggesting that the legal system of the United States is, after all, in tacit alliance with the monarchical theory of the universe, and will, therefore, prohibit and persecute religious ideas and practices based on an organic and unitary vision of the universe.[11]

## Footnotes

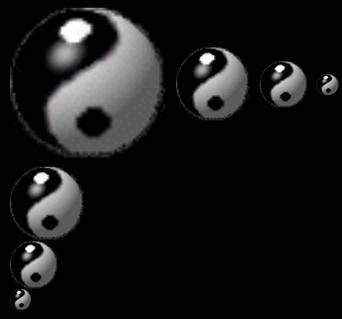
1. See W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). [back](#)
2. An excellent anthology of such experiences is R. Johnson *Watcher on the Hills* (1959). [back](#)
3. Thus Hinduism regards the universe not as an artifact, but as an immense drama in which the One Actor (the *paramatman* or *brahman*) plays all the parts, which are his (or "its") masks or personae. The sensation of being only this one particular self, John Doe, is due to the Actor's total absorption in playing this and every other part. For fuller exposition, see S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (1927); H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (1951), pp. 355-463. A popular version is in A. Watts, *The Book---On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (1966). [back](#)
4. [Isaiah 45: 6, 7](#). [back](#)
5. Chandogya Upanishad 6.15.3. [back](#)
6. Alfred Lord Tennyson, *A Memoir by His Son* (1898), 320. [back](#)
7. A Prayer for the King's Majesty, Order for Morning Prayer, Book of Common Prayer (Church of England, 1904). [back](#)
8. Thus, until quite recently, belief in a Supreme Being was a legal test of valid

conscientious objection to military service. The implication was that the individual objector found himself bound to obey a higher echelon of command than the President and Congress. The analogy is military and monarchical, and therefore objectors who, as Buddhists or naturalists, held an organic theory of the universe often had difficulty in obtaining recognition. [back](#)

9. This is discussed at length in A. Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (1962). [back](#)
10. "Responsible" in the sense that such substances be taken by or administered to consenting adults only. The user of cannabis, in particular, is apt to have peculiar difficulties in establishing his "undoubted mystical and religious intent" in court. Having committed so loathsome and serious a felony, his chances of clemency are better if he assumes a repentant demeanor, which is quite inconsistent with the sincere belief that his use of cannabis was religious. On the other hand, if he insists unrepentantly that he looks upon such use as a religious sacrament, many judges will declare that they "dislike his attitude," finding it truculent and lacking in appreciation of the gravity of the crime, and the sentence will be that much harsher. The accused is therefore put in a "double-bind" situation, in which he is "damned if he does, and damned if he doesn't." Furthermore, religious integrity--as in conscientious objection--is generally tested and established by membership in some church or religious organization with a substantial following. But the felonious status of cannabis is such that grave suspicion would be cast upon all individuals forming such an organization, and the test cannot therefore be fulfilled. It is generally forgotten that our guarantees of religious freedom were designed to protect precisely those who were not members of established denominations, but rather such (then) screwball and subversive individuals as Quakers, Shakers, Levellers, and Anabaptists. There is little question that those who use cannabis or other psychedelics with religious intent are now members of a persecuted religion which appears to the rest of society as a grave menace to "mental health," as distinct from the old-fashioned "immortal soul." But it's the same old story. [back](#)
11. Amerindians belonging to the Native American Church who employ the psychedelic peyote cactus in their rituals, are firmly opposed to any government control of this plant, even if they should be guaranteed the right to its use. They feel that peyote is a natural gift of God to mankind, and especially to natives of the land where it grows, and that no government has a right to interfere with its use. The same argument might be made on behalf of cannabis, or the mushroom *Psilocybe mexicana* Heim. All these things are natural plants, not processed or synthesized drugs, and by what authority can individuals be prevented from eating them? There is no law against eating or growing the mushroom *Amanita pantherina*, even though it is fatally poisonous and only experts can distinguish it from a common edible mushroom. This case can be made even from the standpoint of believers in the monarchical universe of Judaism and Christianity, for it is a basic principle of both religions, derived from Genesis, that all natural substances created by God are inherently good, and that evil can arise only in their misuse. Thus laws against mere possession, or even cultivation, of these plants are in basic conflict with biblical principles. Criminal conviction of those who

employ these plants should be based on proven misuse. "And God said 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed- to you it shall be for meat.... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.'" [Genesis 1:29, 31.](#)

[Alan Watts](#) at [deoxy.org](#)



# Alan Watts Speak

*a virtual q&a.*



Hey Alan...

Why *must* everyone  
**experience** their divinity?

WHAT'S THE  
PROBLEM?

How would you describe the  
universe?

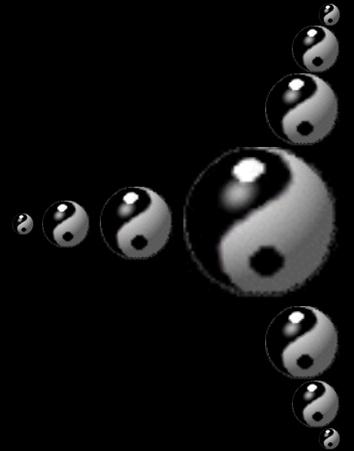
Are we just going around in circles??   

Why are  
*alternative states*  
*of consciousness*  
so taboo these  
days?

The GARDEN of ID and Original SICK



# Ex nihilo nihil fit?



## PERMANENT BRAIN DAMAGE

### whataboutevil?

I'm really *really* trying but...

Audio problems? Here's the transcriptions.



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# Self and Other

by Alan Watts

Now, the subject of this seminar is 'Self and Other,' and this is therefore to be an exploration into the subject that interests me most, which is the problem of personal identity, man's relationship to the universe, and all the things that are connected with that. It is, for our culture at this time in history an extremely urgent problem, because of our technological power. In known history, nobody has had such capacity for altering the universe than the people of the United States of America. And nobody has gone about it in such an aggressive way.

I think sometimes that the two symbols of our present kind of technological culture are the rocket ship and the bulldozer. The rocket as a very, very phallic symbol of compensation for the sexually inadequate male. And the bulldozer, which ruthlessly pushes down hills and forests and alters the shape of the landscape. These are two symbols of the negative aspect of our technology. I'm not going to take the position that technology is a mistake. I think that there could be a new kind of technology, using a new attitude. But the trouble is that a great deal of our power is wielded by men who I would call 'two o'clock types.'

Maybe you saw an article I wrote in "Playboy" magazine called "The Circle of Sex," and it suggested at least a dozen sexual types rather than two. And that the men who are two o'clock on the dial, like a clock, are men who are ambisexterous, named after Julius Ceasar, because Julius Ceasar was an ambisexterous man, and he equally made love to all his friend's wives and to his good-looking officers. And he had no sense of guilt about this at all. Now, that type of male in this culture has a terrible sense of guilt, that he might be homosexual, and is scared to death of being one, and therefore he has to overcompensate for his masculinity. And so he comes on as a police officer, Marine sergeant, bouncer, bookie, general--tough, cigar-chewing, real masculine type who is never able to form a relationship with a woman; they're just 'dames' as far as he's concerned. But he, just like an ace Air Force pilot puts a little mark on his plane each time he shoots down an enemy, so this kind of man, every time he makes a dame he chalks up one, because that reassures him that he is after all a male. And he's a terrible nuisance. The trouble is that the culture doesn't permit him to recognize and accept his ambisexterity. And so he's a trouble spot.

But that kind of spirit of knocking the world around is something that is causing serious danger here. It arises, you see, because this tremendous technological power has been evolved in a culture which inherits a sense of personality which is frankly a hallucination. And we get this sense of personality from a long, long tradition of Jewish and Christian and Greek ideas which have caused man to feel that the universe of nature - the physical world, in other words - is not himself. You may think that that is a very odd thing to say, because one always assumes that oneself is one's own body, or at least something inside one's body, like a soul. And that naturally, everything outside is not oneself. But this is, as I've said many, many times, a hallucination. Let's think, here we are in the middle of New York City. And you know what happens when New York City goes wrong. When there's a subway strike, or when the power fails, or when the sewers back up, your life is in danger. Because you are not only constituted by the bloodstream of your veins and the communications

network of your nervous system. An extension of your bloodstream, and of your alimentary canal, and of your nervous system, is all the communication systems of this city.

In other words, you know well every night streams of trucks pour into this city, carrying food. I understand there is even a kind of big drain pipe which brings milk in. You consume three million pounds of fish a week. You then also have to have the exit end of this. The sewers are very complicated. The water system and all its pipes, the telephone systems, the electric light systems, the air conditioning things, the traffic streams. All these things going on are essential extensions of your own inner tubing. And therefore, you have to be aware, more and more, that the city is an extended body for every person living in it. And not only of course the city, because the city depends on untold acres of fields where farm products are grown, cattle are raised, on lakes and underground water sources; on the constitution of the atmosphere, and finally on the location of the Earth on this propitious spot rather close to the sun, where we have our basic heating system working.

And all that is not a world into which you arrived, from somewhere else altogether. It is a complex system of relationships, out of which you grew in exactly the same way that fruit grows on a tree, or a flower on a stem. Just as these blossoms here are symptomatic of the plant, and you identify the plant by looking at the blossoms - here are these little oranges, you see - we know that this is an orange tree. Now in exactly that way, you are all growing in this world, and so we know that this world is a 'humaning' system - and therefore it has a certain kind of innate intelligence, just as this tree, with its roots, has the innate intelligence which comes out in these oranges.

So the cosmos in which we live is a network of communications. You don't need to think of it in an authoritarian pattern, namely there is God the father, who makes it all work, because that doesn't really answer anything. That's just applying to the world an explanation derived from the political systems of the ancient Near East. You realize that? The great political systems of the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, where there was an enormous father figure in charge of everything, became the model for the idea of monotheism. And these great kings, like Hammurabi and Amenhotep IV, laid down legal systems so man thought of a prince, a king of kings, a lord of lords, in the words of the Book of Common Prayer. It's a political idea. And I often wonder how citizens of a republic, who have to curse and swear that they think that this is the best form of government, can put up with a monarchical conception of nature. Very funny. You know, a republic, and it says 'In God We Trust,' and most people by God mean a king of the universe. Very strange.

But you don't have to think that way in order to have the faith that the universe is something other than mere stupid, blind energy. What we are coming to see is that the total universe, consisting of all its galaxies, and not only this galaxy, is a living organism. How will we define that? What do we mean by a living organism? I mean a system of intercommunication of extreme complexity. Just like you are. You try to define what you are, and you go into it, you suddenly discover that as you take off the skin and look underneath, that we are an enormously complex system of tubes and fibers, beautifully patterned. When we look at it with a microscope, we say 'Oh my, look at that. Isn't that gorgeous?' Have you seen those models of cells that the Upjohn Company has made? They're exquisite. And incidentally, you should all, if you've never done so, go to the

Charles Darwin Hall in the New York Museum of Natural History and see the glass models of the tiniest microorganisms, called radiolaria. They are also such things as are running around in you, and they are incomparable jewelry.

Now I suppose if we looked at ourselves from that microscopic point of view, all these funny creatures that are running around us that don't look like people, would if you got used to them seem like people. And they would be having their problems. They've got all sorts of fights going on, and collaborations and conspiracies and so on. But if they weren't doing that, we wouldn't be healthy. If the various corpuscles and cells in our blood stream weren't fighting each other, we would drop dead. And that's a sobering thought, that war at one level of being can bring peace and health at another.

So we are, inside us, each individual body, an enormous ecological system. And what we have to recognize is that that interconnected system which constitutes the beauty of a human organism, that sort of interconnection is going on outside us. Do you remember in early science fiction that was published in the 1920s, by people like Olaf Stapleton and some of the early writers? They pictured the men of the future as having huge heads to contain very big brains. It was expected, in other words, that the future evolution of mankind would be an evolution of the mind and the brain, and so bigger brains. But what has happened instead of that is that instead of evolving bigness of brain, we are evolving an electronic network in which our brains are very swiftly being plugged into computer systems. Now some very awkward things about this are arising, and we've got to watch out for it, because what has increasingly happened is this: nobody is having any private life left. The invasion of ordinary privacy by the telephone, by your watching television, which is after all looking at somebody else's life going on, by people watching you - all the people with bugging systems and snoopers, and credit agents, and everybody knows everything about you. Even in California, all the houses are built with picture windows looking at other picture windows, and if you draw the curtains, everyone thinks you're snooty. Like if you build a fence in most Midwestern communities, they think 'Who the hell do you think you are, building a fence to keep everybody else out? See, you're not democratic.'

But the reason for all this is, imagine the situation when all the original neurons became linked in with the central nervous system. They said, 'Well, we're losing our privacy.' So it's a very serious question as to how we're going to be linked in with other people. I feel - it may be old fashioned of me - but I feel very strongly that privacy should be maintained as much as possible. But the reason being that human beings, in my experience, are a combination of two worlds - the private world and the public world - such that a person with a very strong and different and unique personality is not an isolated person, but a person extremely aware of his identity with the rest of the universe. Whereas people with nondescript, mass-produced personalities tend to be unaware of this. They tend to be the kind of person who is taken in by the system.

So what I think we could aim for in the way of human civilization and culture would be a system in which we are all highly aware of our existing interconnection and unity with the whole domain of nature, and therefore do not have to go to all sorts of wild extremes to find that union. In other words, look at the number of people we know who are terrified of silence, and who have to have something going all the time, some noise streaming into their

ears. They're doing that because of their intense sense of loneliness. And so when they feel silent, they feel lonely and they want to escape from it. Or people who just want to get together. As we say, they want to escape from themselves. More people spend more time running away from themselves. Isn't that wretched? What a definition. What an experience of self if it's something you've always got to be running away from and forgetting. Say you read a mystery story. Why? So you forget yourself. You join a religion. Why? To forget yourself. You get absorbed in a political movement. Why? To forget yourself. Well it must be a pretty miserable kind of self if you have to forget it like that. Now for a person who doesn't have an isolated sense of self, he has no need to run away from it, because he knows.

Let's take hermits. People today think being a hermit is a very unhealthy thing to do. Very antisocial, doesn't contribute anything to everybody else - because everybody else is busy contributing like blazes, and a few people have to run off and get out of the way. But I'll tell you what hermits realize. If you go off into a far, far forest and get very quiet, you'll come to understand that you're connected with everything. That every little insect that comes buzzing around you is a messenger, and that little insect is connected with human beings everywhere else. You can hear. You become incredibly sensitive in your ears and you hear far-off sounds. And just by the very nature of isolating yourself and becoming quiet, you become intensely aware of your relationship with everything else that's going on. So if you really want to find out how related you really are, try a little solitude off somewhere, and let it begin to tell you how everything is interdependent in the form of what the Japanese buddhists call 'jijimugi'(?). 'Ji' means a 'thing event,' so it means 'between thing event and thing event, there is no block.' Every thing in the world, every event, is like a dewdrop on a multidimensional spider's web, and every dewdrop contains the reflection of all the other dewdrops. But you see, the hermit finds this out through his solitude, and so also human beings can acquire a certain solitude, even in the middle of New York City. It's rather easier, as a matter of fact, to find solitude in New York City than it is in Des Moines, Iowa.

But the point is that a human represents a certain kind of development, wherein a maximal sense of his oneness with the whole universe goes hand in hand with the maximum development of his personality as somebody unique and different. Whereas the people who are of course trying to develop their personality directly and taking a Dale Carnegie course on how to win friends and influence people, or how to become successful - all those people come out as if they came from the same cookie cutter. They don't have any personality.

Now then, it therefore becomes the great enterprise of our time from this point of view so this technology shall not go awry, and that it shall not be a war with the cosmos, that we acquire a new sense of identity. It isn't just a theoretical thing that we know about, as ecologists, for example, know about the identity of the organism with its environment, but becomes something that we actually experience. And I feel that this is not at all beyond the bounds of possibility for an enormous number of people. For a simple reason. Let me draw a historical analogy. Several hundred years ago, it seemed absolutely incomprehensible for most people that the world could be round, or that the planets and stars should be up in the sky unsupported, or even that the Earth itself should be floating freely in space. The Earth is falling through space, but it seems stable, and therefore it was supposed in ancient mythologies that the Earth rested on a giant turtle. Nobody asked too carefully what the turtle rested on, but just so that there was some sense of solidity under things. So in the same

way that the stars were supposed to be suspended in crystal spheres, and just as people know that the Earth is flat because you can look at it and see that it is, so people looked into the sky and they could see the crystal spheres. Of course you could see the crystal spheres: you could see right through them. So when the astronomers cast doubts on the existence of crystal spheres, everybody felt threatened, that the stars were going to fall on their heads. Just as when they talked about a round Earth, people felt a danger of if you went around to the other side, you'd drop off, or feel funny and upside-down, a rush of brains to the head, and all sorts of uncomfortable feelings. But then since then, we have got quite used to the idea that the stars float freely in space in gravitational fields, that you can go around the Earth without falling off, and now everybody realizes this and feels comfortable with it.

Likewise, in our day when Einstein propounded the theories of relativity, people said they couldn't understand it. It used to be something at a cocktail party to be introduced to somebody who understands Einstein. Now every young person understands Einstein and knows what it's about. You've got even one year of college, you know what relativity is. And you know it not only in an intellectual way, you know this as a feeling, just as you have a feeling of the roundness of the world, especially if you travel a lot on jet planes. So I feel that in just that way, within I don't know how many years, but in not too long a time, it's going to become basic common sense that you are not some alien being who confronts an external world that is not you, but that almost every intelligent person will have the feeling of being an activity of the entire universe.

You see, the point is that an enormous number of things are going on inside us of which we are not conscious. We make a very, very arbitrary distinction between what we do voluntarily and what we do involuntarily, and we define all those things which we do involuntarily as things which 'happen' to us, rather than things that we do. In other words, we don't assume any responsibility for the fact that our heart beats, or that our bones have such and such a shape. You can say to a beautiful girl, 'Gee, you're gorgeous,' and she'd say 'How like a man, all you think about is bodies. My body was given to me by my parents, and I'm not responsible for it, and I'd like to be admired for my self and not for my chassis.' And so I'd tell her 'You poor little chauffeur. You've disowned your own being and identified yourself not being associated with your own body.' I agree that if she had a terrible body with a lousy figure, she might want to feel that way, but if she is a fine-looking human being, she should get with it and not disown herself. But this happens again and again.

So you see, if you become aware of the fact that you are all of your own body, and that the beating of your heart is not just something that happens to you, but something you're doing, then you become aware also in the same moment and at the same time that you're not only beating your heart, but that you are shining the sun. Why? Because the process of your bodily existence and its rhythms is a process, an energy system which is continuous with the shining of the sun, just like the East River, here, is a continuous energy system, and all the waves in it are activities of the whole East River, and that's continuous with the Atlantic Ocean, and that's all one energy system and finally the Atlantic ocean gets around to being the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, etc., and so all the waters of the Earth are a continuous energy system. It isn't just that the East River is part of it. You can't draw any line and say 'Look, this is where the East River ends and the rest of it begins,' as if you can in the parts of an automobile, where you can say 'This is definitely part of the generator,

here, and over here is a spark plug.' There's not that kind of isolation between the elements of nature.

So your body knows that its energy system is one with and continuous with the whole energy system, and that if it's in any sense true to say that I am my body, and that I beat my heart, and that I think by growing a brain, where do you draw the line between what you think and the power to think? Do you think with your brain in the same way that you carve wood with a knife? Y'know, it's an instrument that you pick up and use. I don't think our bodies are just instrumental in that way. They're something we are doing, only we don't think about it, in the sense that we don't have to consider when we get up in the morning as an act of voluntary behavior how to connect all of the switches in our brain to get us ready for the day; they come on automatically. But this automatic or, I would rather call it, spontaneous functioning of the brain is what is called in Japanese 'shizen'(?), that is to say, the spontaneity of nature. It does all this, and what we perform consciously is simply a small fragment of our total activity, of which we happen to be aware in a special way. We are far more than that. And it isn't only, say, that the sun is light because we have eyes and optical nerves which translate the energy of the sun into an experience called 'light.' It is also that that very central fire of the sun is something that you are doing just as much as you are generating temperature in your body.

In other words, let's suppose that those cosmologists and astronomers are right who believe that this universe started out with an original big bang, which flung all those galaxies out into space. Well, you know what that would be like. It'd be like taking a bottle of ink and flinging it hard at a white wall, and it makes a great splash. And you know how the nature of a splash is--in the middle of it, it's dense, and as it gets to the outside of the splash, there's all kinds of curlicues. But it's a continuous energy system. In other words, the bang in the beginning cannot really be separated from the little curlicues at the end. So, supposing there was an original cosmic explosion which went *FOOM*, we sitting around in this room now are little curlicues on the end of it, you see? We are, actually, every one of us is incredibly ancient. The energy which is now manifested as your body is the same energy which was there in the beginning. If anything at all is old, this hand is as old as anything there is. Incredibly ancient. I mean, the energy keeps changing shapes, doing all sorts of things, but there it all is. It's one continuous SPAT.

Now, if you just want to define yourself as a little curlicue on the end of things and say 'That's all of me there is,' then you've got to be a puppet and say 'Well, I've been pushed around by this whole system.' Like a juvenile delinquent who knows a little Freud. 'Well I can't help what I'm doing, because it was my mother. She was terribly mixed up, and she didn't bring me up properly, and my father was a mess. He was an alcoholic and he never paid any attention to me. So I'm a juvenile delinquent.' So the social worker says 'Yes, I'm afraid that's so,' and eventually some journalist gets ahold of it and says 'We should punish the parents instead of the kids.' So they go around to the parents and the mother says 'Yes, I admit I'm a mess,' and the father says 'Of course I'm an alcoholic, but it was OUR parents who brought us up wrong, and we had all that trouble.' Well, they can't find them because they're dead. And so you can go passing the buck way back, and you get to some characters called Adam and Eve. And when THEY were told they were responsible, they passed it again to a snake. And when that snake was asked about it, he passed the buck back to God,

and God said 'I disown you, because I don't let my right hand know what my left hand doeth.' And you know who the left hand of God is. The right hand is Jesus Christ, the left is the Devil. Only it mustn't be admitted. Not on your life.

But that's the whole thing, you see, in a nutshell. That once you define yourself as the puppet, you say 'I'm just poor little me, and I got mixed up in this world. I didn't ask to be born. My father and mother gave me a body which is a system of tubes into which I got somehow mixed up, and it's a maze and a tunnel and I don't understand a way around it. It needs all these engineers and doctors and so on to fix it, educate it, tell it how to keep going, and I'm mixed up in it. Poor little me.' Well this is nonsense! You aren't mixed up in it, **it's you**, and everybody's being a blushing violet and saying 'I'm not responsible for this universe, I merely came into it.' And the whole function of every great guru is to kid you out of that, and look at you and say 'Don't give me that line of bull.' But you have to be tactful; you have to be effective. You can't just tell people this. You can't talk people out of an illusion. It's a curious thing.

There's a whole debate going on now, as you all know, about whether God exists, and they're going to do a cover story on God in 'Time' magazine, and they sent a reporter around to me - they sent reporters around to all sorts of prominent theologians and philosophers. I said 'I have a photograph of God which you must put on the cover.' It's a gorgeous photograph of a Mexican statue made by Dick Borst(?). Beautiful God-the-father with a crown like the Pope. Only they said they were going to use something by Tintoretto. This photograph is a lovely thing. You know, a real genuine Mexican Indian thing. Simple people think this is what God looks like; very handsome man. Anyway, they're going to do a cover story on God because the theologians are now arguing about a new kind of Christianity which says there's no God and Jesus Christ is his only son. But what these people want to do is they desperately want to keep the church in Christianity because it pays off, that's the minister's job, and although they feel very embarrassed about God, what they're doing is they want the Bible and Jesus to sort of keep this authority going. How you can do that, I don't know.

But at any rate, the point is that God is what nobody admits to being, and everybody really is. You don't look out there for God, something in the sky, you look in you. In other words, underneath the surface of the consciousness that you have and the individual role that you play and are identifying yourself with, you are the works. Just as you ARE beating your heart, in the same way you're shining the sun, and you're responsible. But in our culture, you mayn't admit this, because if you come on that you're God, they'll put you in the nuthouse. Because our idea of God is based on Near Eastern politics, and so if you're God, then you're the ruler, the governor - 'Oh Lord our governor!' And so if you're the governor, you know all the answers if that's what you claim to be. So when anybody in our culture says 'I'm God,' we say 'Well, well, why don't you turn this shoe into a rabbit and show me that you're God.'

But of course in Oriental cultures, they don't think of God as an autocrat. God is the fundamental energy of the world which performs all this world without having to think about it. Just in the same way that you open and close your hand without being able to say in words how you do it. You do it. You say 'I can open and close my hand.' But how? You don't know. That only means, though, that you don't know in words. You do know in fact,

because you do it. So in the same way, you know how to beat your heart, because you do it, but you can't explain it in words. You know how to shine the sun, because you do it, but you can't explain it in words, unless you're a very fancy physicist, and he's just finding out - what a physicist is doing is translating what he's been doing all along into a code called mathematics. Then he says he knows how it's done. He means he can put it into the code - and that's what the academic world is. It's translating what happened into certain codes called words, numbers, algorithms, etc., and that helps us repair things when they go wrong.

So, the discovery of our inseparability from everything else is something that I don't think will have to come by the primitive methods of difficult yoga meditations, or even through the use of psychedelic chemicals. I think it's something that's within the reach of very many people's simple comprehension. Once you get the point. Just in the same way you can understand that the world is round and you experience it as such. You could call this a kind of guinana(?) yoga, in Hindu terms. But I don't think it's going to be necessary for our culture to get this point by staring at it's navel, or by spending hours practicing Za-Zen, not that I've got anything against it, because after all, to sit still can be an extraordinarily pleasant thing to do, and it's important for us to have more quiet. But I think this is essentially a matter of intuitive comprehension that will dawn upon us and suddenly hit us all in a heap, and you suddenly see that this is totally common sense, and that your present feeling of how you are is a **hoax**. You know how Henry Emerson Foster wrote a book called 'How to be a Real Person'? Translated into it's original terms, that means 'How to be a Genuine Fake.' Because the person is the mask, the 'persona' worn by actors in Greco-Roman drama. They put a mask on their face which had a megaphone-shaped mouth which projected the sound in an open-air theater. So the 'dramatis persona' at the beginning of a play is the list of masks, and the word 'person,' which means 'mask,' has come to mean the real you. 'How to be a Real Person.' Imagine.

But I think we'll get over it, and discover the thing that we simply don't let our children in on, that we don't let ourselves in on. Let me emphasize this point again. It is not at the moment common sense, not plausible, because of our condition, but we can very simply come to see that YOU are not some kind of accident that pops up for a while and then vanishes - but that deep inwards, you are what there is and all that there is, which is eternal, and that which there is no whicher. That's you. Now, you don't have to remember that all the time, as you don't have to remember how to beat your heart. You could die and forget everything you ever knew in this lifetime, because it's not necessary to remember it. You're going to pop up as somebody else later on, just as you did before, without knowing who you were. It's as simple as that. You were born once, you can get born again. If there was a cosmic explosion once that blew everything into existence and is going to fizzle out, if it happened once, it can happen again, and it goes on..

It's a kind of undulating system of vibrations. Everything's a system of vibrations. Everything is on/off. Now you see it, now you don't. Light itself is, but it's happening so fast that the retina doesn't register it. Everything in the sun is like an arc-lamp, only it's a very fast one. It goes on-off. Sound does; and the reason you can't put your finger through the floor is the same reason you can't, without serious problems, push it through an electric fan. The floor is going so fast. Even faster than a fan. The fan is going slow enough to cut your

finger if you put it into it. But the floor is going so fast, you can't even get in. But that's the only reason. It's coming into existence and going out of existence at a terrific clip. So everything is on/off. So is our life. You can die, say 'Well, I don't know where I'm going, I don't know anything.' Just like in the same way you don't know what's going on inside your nervous system. How the nervous system links together, or anything like that. You don't need to know, and if you had to find it all out, you'd get so confused with all the information that you wouldn't be able to operate. It'd be just too much to think about with a single-pointed ordinary attention consciousness, which is a scanning system, like radar. You don't need to know how it all works in order to work it out. That's the real meaning of omnipotence.

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### ALAN WATTS: SELF AND OTHER, part 2 of 3

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This morning, I was discussing the problem of technological civilization's urgent need for a new sense of human existence, in which the human being no longer discovers himself as an alien oddity, somehow trapped and caught up in a system of tubes called the body, confronting an external world which is not himself. The urgency of realizing that just as this city is an extension of you, so is everything out to the farthest galaxies that we have any knowledge of, and beyond. Of regaining a sense of responsibility and identity with the basic functioning of your self as a complete physical organism, and that beyond that, your own organism, in a certain sense, knows its identity with its whole environment. In other words, the human body belongs in a continuous energy system which is co-extensive with the universe. And instead of making out that this is something you got caught up in, and for which you are not responsible, and in which you are just a victim, and if you're lucky, you beat the game for a while, and win until death destroys you and you lose everything. You know, you can't take it with you.

That reminds me of a funny-- Gary Schneider is a great friend of mine. He's a poet from the West Coast, and he's a very good Zen student. He's studying under Oda-Roshi. And he suggested one day that we found a null and void title in Gary and Trust Company, with its slogan 'Register your absence with us.' And what you do is, you give your fortune to us, and we guarantee to transport it to you in the next life.

Anyway. This situation, I was suggesting, is one that can be overcome reasonably simply, if you can just get the idea straight. A lot of people say, you know, 'I understand what you say intellectually, but that's not enough. I don't really understand it.' But I often think that when people say that, they don't fully understand it intellectually. If you can get something quite clear, really clear in your head, I don't think that our mind is compartmentalized so that the intellect's over here, and the feelings are over here, and the intuition is over there, and the sensations are over there. I don't think Jung meant that when he made that classification. I think every faculty of the mind is continuous with all the others.

And so what you're saying when you say 'I understand it intellectually, but I don't get it intuitively,' or 'I don't feel it in my bones,' is that you understand it in the sense of being able to repeat a form of words. Now it's true that there's lots of debates and problems that are purely verbal. A great deal of what goes on as theological or philosophical discussion is absolutely nothing except a war of words. A logical positivist, for example, can show conclusively that all metaphysical statements are meaningless. But so what? That's just talk.

People have, on the other hand, experienced, say, mystical states, and these experiences are quite as real as the experience of swimming in water, or lying in the sun, or eating a steak, or dying. And you can't talk them away. They're THERE, in a very concrete sense. But there is a very close connection between your conceptual understanding of the world and how you actually see the world.

In other words, let's take for example this problem: there are people who don't have number systems going beyond three. They count 'One, two, three, many.' So anything above three is a heap, or many. Now those people cannot know that a square table has four corners. It has many corners. But once you're able to count beyond four, you can extend your counting system indefinitely. You have a different feeling about nature. It's not only you know more, but you feel more. You feel more clearly. So my point is simply that the intellect is not something cut off from every other kind of experience, existing in a kind of abstract vacuum which has nothing to do with anything else. The intellect is part and parcel of the whole fabric of life. It goes along with your fingers; it goes along with being able to touch. After all, what an intellectual thing in a way the human hand is. It can do things that other hands can't do. No other mammal can have thumb-finger contact. The monkey doesn't achieve it.

So the hand is intellectual. So, as a matter of fact, a plant is intellectual. This thing is a gorgeous pattern. If you look into it and realize how this is designed to absorb light and moisture and so on, and to expose itself in different ways and to propagate its species, that it's in alliance with bees and other insects, so that the bees and the plants, since they go together and are found together, they're all one continuous form of life. This doesn't exist except in a world where bees are floating around. I mean, you can bring it into an apartment, but you can't expect it to propagate beyond that point. It's decorative here. But in its natural habitat, this goes along with being bees, and bees go with their being something else. So this form that you see here is inseparable from all kinds of other forms which must exist if this is to exist. And the bees have language, if you've read Van Fritche's(?) book about bees and their marvelous intelligence. But you see that the intelligence of the plant is the same as the pattern of the plant. You shouldn't think that I would say the plant is the result of intelligence. The shape of it is the same as its intelligence. The shape of your brain, the shape of your face, the whole structure of the culture you live in, the human interrelationships that go on-- it's that pattern which is intelligence.

Now what I'm trying to talk about is a deeper understanding of the pattern in which we live, and if you understand that, it suddenly hits you so that you feel, right in your guts, this new kind of existence that is NOT yourself alone facing an alien world, but yourself as an expression of the world in the same way as the wave is the expression of the ocean.

Now then, the most important shift one has to make in intelligence and understanding this is to be able to think in a polar way. We sometimes say of things that we want to describe as being opposed to each other as being in conflict, that they are 'the poles apart.' People who belong to different schools of thought; people who belong to nations in opposition with each other; people who are in flat, outright conflict, we say they are the poles apart. But that's a very funny phrase. Because things that are the poles apart happen to be very deeply connected. The North and the South Pole are the poles of one Earth. So try to imagine a situation in which there is an encounter between opposites, which have no connection with

each other at all. Where will they come from? How will they meet each other? You think from the opposite ends of space? But what is space? For space to have opposite ends, there has to be a continuum between the ends. And so to think in a polar way is to realize the intimate connection between processes or events or things, which language describes as if they were unconnected and opposed.

Let's take, first of all, two very fundamental poles. We'll call them respectively 'solid' and 'space,' if you want existence and non-existence, because we tend to treat space as something that is not there. That's simply because we don't see it; we ignore it. We treat it as if it had no effective function whatsoever, and thus when our astronomers begin to talk about curved space, expanding space, properties of space, and so on, we think 'What are they talking about? How can space have a shape? How can there be a structure in space, because space is nothing.' But it isn't so. You see, this is something we completely ignore. Why? Because we have specialized in a form of attention to the world which concentrates on certain features as important. We call this conscious attention, and therefore it ignores or screens out everything which doesn't fit into its particular scheme. And one of the things that doesn't fit into our scheme is space. So we come into a room like this and notice all the people in the room, and the furniture, and the flowers and the ornaments, and think that everything else just isn't there. I mean, what about this interval that is between me sitting here and the inner circle of people who are arranged around the floor? What a mess we would be in if there wasn't that interval. You know, I would be blowing down your throat to talk to you.

Now intervals of this spacial kind are tremendously important. Let me demonstrate this to you in a musical way. When you listen to a melody, what is the difference between hearing that melody and hearing a series of noises? The answer is that you heard the intervals. You heard the musical spaces between the series of tones. If you didn't hear that, you heard no melody, and you would be what's called tone-deaf. But what you actually hear is the steps between the levels of sound--the levels of vibration--that constitute the different tones. Now those weren't stated, they were tacit. Only the tones were stated, but you heard the interval. So it made all the difference whether you heard the interval or not. So in exactly the same way, the intervals between us, seated around here, constitute many important things. They constitute the dignity of us all. They constitute the fact my face isn't all mashed up in your face, and that we therefore have individual faces, and that need spaces around us.

In a country like Japan, space is the most valuable commodity, because it's a small island that's heavily overpopulated. So an apartment in Japan costs you a lot of money; in Hong Kong, it's sky-high. But they have mastered the control of space in a fantastic way. And one of the ways they control space is through politeness. You can live with other people so that you live in a house where you're so close together that you can hear every belly rumble of your neighbor, and you know exactly what's going on. But you learn to hear without listening, and to see without looking. There's a courtesy, you see, a respect for privacy which puts an interval between one individual and another. And it's by reason of that interval that you are defined as you and I'm defined as I.

So you see the various kinds of space, various kinds of intervals? The pauses, when a person plays the drum--it's those intervals--otherwise it would be of no interest. It's the intervals

that make the thing valuable. The space, then, is as real as the solid. This is the principle of polarity. Space and solid, in other words, which are formally opposed things. And you think, 'Well, where there is a solid, there is something, and where there is space, there is nothing.' They are actually as mutually supportive as back and front. They go together. Nobody ever found a space without a solid, and nobody ever found a solid without a space. But we've been trained to fix our attention on the solid and disregard the space. Well then obviously you haven't been given the news, you haven't been let in on what the secret of life is. It is that the space is as important as the solid. And if you see that, then you have the clue.

Now in the same way exactly, all other kinds of supposedly opposed entities and forces imply and involve each other. And this is the key to getting a different kind of consciousness of oneself, because you wouldn't know who you are unless you knew what you have defined as other than yourself. Self and other define each other mutually. Let's consider this first of all in a kind of a funny social way. In every town in the United States, there are a group of people who consider themselves to be the 'nice' people. They live on the right side of the tracks. Where I live in Sausalito, California, they live up on the hill, and down on the waterfront, there live all kinds of beatniks and bums, and we live in boats and shacks of all kinds. Some of these shacks are elegant inside, but that's a secret. We call the boat I live on the Oyster, because you know how an oyster's shell on the outside is very rough and crude, but there's pearls on the inside.

But anyway, the people up on the hill say--what do they talk about? When they get together for cocktails or dinner or whatever and they have their social occasions, what's the topic of conversation? It's how the people are awful down below, and they're encroaching and the town is going to the dogs, and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. By this means, they preserve their collective ego. Meanwhile, the people down below, what do they talk about at their parties? They talk about the squares up on the hill who are engaged in business, which is ridiculous because it's nothing but a rat-race, and they buy Cadillacs and other phony objects, and they deride them, but in the same way, those beatniks are enhancing THEIR collective ego, and they don't realize that they need each other. That the symbiosis between the nice people and the nasty people, between the 'in' group and the 'out' group, is as much a symbiosis as between the bees and the flowers. Because you wouldn't know who you were, unless there was an outsider.

In exactly the same way, politically speaking, our economy is presently dependant upon the cold war, which mustn't be allowed to become hot. Because if there weren't an enemy, defined as communism, nobody would be disturbed, nobody would be worried, therefore they wouldn't put all this energy and money and taxes into a certain kind of productivity. Likewise on the other side, if those people in China and Russia couldn't be worried about and afraid of the dirty capitalists, they wouldn't have any means of stirring up their people to do something. Everybody would presumably just loaf around.

So because you define your position in opposition to another position, then you know who you are courtesy of the outsider, and so you can say to the outsider--if this suddenly strikes you, you start laughing, because you realize that you're indebted to the outsider, whom you defined as awful, because you know where he is, you know where you are. Well now it's the same thing in philosophy and religion. There are all sorts of schools of thought, and they

disagree with each other, they debate with each other, but so far as I'm concerned, I wouldn't know what I thought unless there were people who had different opinions than mine. Therefore, instead of saying to those people, 'You ought to agree with me,' I'd say to them, 'Thank you so much for disagreeing, because now I know where I am.' I wouldn't know otherwise. In other words, the in goes with the out; the solid with the space. It's a very funny thing.

Take any highly organized system of life. Take the way a garden exists. It's full of, in a sense, competitive species. Snails and thrushes and various insects that are supposed to be at war with each other. And because their fights keep going on, the life of the garden as a whole is maintained. And so I can't say 'All snails in this garden should be abolished, so that the lettuces should thrive,' because if there aren't some snails around there, the birds won't come around, because they like the snails. And the birds do all sorts of things for my garden, not to mention supplying it with manure and all kinds of things. So I need them around. So the price of having birds is snails that eat your lettuces. And so on. I mean, this is merely an instance, an example of this.

The funny thing is, though, that when you realize this, and you suddenly see for the first time that you and your point of view, and everything that you stand for and believe in--and you think 'Boy, I'm going to stand for that and I'm going to fight for that!'--that it depends on its opposite. When you get that, it starts giving you the giggles, and you begin to laugh at yourself, and this is one of the most amazing forces in life, the creative force is human. Because when you are in a state of anxiety, and you are afraid that black may win over white, that darkness may conquer light, that non-being may conquer being, you haven't seen this point. When it strikes you that the two go together, the trembling emotional feeling which we call anxiety is given another value, and it's called laughter.

Now let's take the phenomenon of an electric bell. When you turn on an electric bell, you turn on a system in which 'yes' implies 'no.' That is to say, here's the bell, and beneath it, there's an electromagnet, and that magnet, when it's switched on, magnetizes an armature, which comes and hits the bell. But the moment it does that, it turns off the current, so that the magnet releases it, and because the armature has a spring on it, it goes back. That turns the current on. So it comes back; that turns the current off. So 'yes' equals 'no'; 'no' equals 'yes.' And so the bell vibrates, which is what you want it to do. Now, how do you interpret your own vibrating, your alternation between 'yes' and 'no'? You can interpret this as an awful thing of doubt, and then you say you were anxious. But if you see that the one implies the other, then it becomes 'ha ha ha ha ha.' It becomes a laugh. So the transformation of anxiety into laughter comes about through realizing the polarity of 'yes' and 'no,' of 'to be' and 'not to be.'

But the important thing for our purposes is the polarity between the self and the other. Let's consider for example, when you hate, you love yourself. 'I love me.' Let's be very egotistic and VERY selfish indeed. What do you love when you love yourself? Think about it. Say you were going to live a completely disillusioned, self-interested life, and other people can go hang. Now consider, what is it that you're interested in? 'Well,' you say for example, 'I like eating.' Okay. Do you eat yourself? 'No. I like eating fish, oysters, radishes, mushrooms.' All these are things that are formally speaking not me, yet these are what I say

I like. Well, could you say 'What I really like about them is the state they put ME in when they impinge on me'? In other words, when I put the mushroom sauce in my mouth, that does something to my mouth and my body, and it's THAT that I like, rather than the mushrooms as such. Well that isn't the truth. If that's all, you can't cook properly. I can tell instantly when I taste something that's been cooked, what state of mind the cook was in.

Now let me tell you a secret. You cannot possibly be a good cook unless you like to pick up an onion in your hands, look it over, and say 'Oh, isn't that lovely?' Or feel an egg. I think an egg is one of the most beautiful shapes on Earth, and you take it up, and although it's an opaque shell, it has a kind of subtle, luminous transparency to it. Especially when you see the variations between white eggs and brown eggs, and you look at those things and you just love them. Now unless you have that feeling, you can't cook. You may follow recipes, you may have had a training course, you may have had everything. But everything you're going to cook, unless you have that feeling, is going to taste as though it's been washed in detergent, and you can tell. It may be that they used no fancy sauces, they roasted a piece of meat. Let's take the Chinese way of cooking a chicken. You take a chicken, and you put in boiling water for ten minutes, with salt and a little sherry. You turn it off, and you leave it there for a half an hour. Then you take it out and chill it, and that can be the most succulent chicken imaginable.

But somehow it doesn't quite come off if this was just a formula. Same way when you strike a note on the piano, it isn't simply a matter of so much pressure which could be measured on some sort of mechanical instrument, because if that was so, all we'd have to do is get those player pianos which hit the notes regularly in accordance with the formula, and they all sound terrible. Because there's a thing in touching that's called follow-through. When you hit a golf ball, it's not enough to hit the ball with a certain volume, you have to have a swing that goes beyond that, and so in the same way with striking notes, there has to be a thing called follow-through, that you go beyond the actual hitting of the note, and that is a thing that's hard to measure, but is very important and makes all the difference.

So then, the relationship of self to other is the complete realization that loving yourself is impossible without loving everything defined as other than yourself. In fact, the more you try to think about what your self is, the more you discover that you can only think about yourself in terms of things that you thought were other than yourself. If you search for yourself, this is one of the great koan problems in Zen, produce you, find out who you are. When, for example, Shri Ramana Maharshi, that great Hindu sage of modern times--people used to come to him and say 'Who was I in my previous incarnation?' You know, that sort of stupid question. He would say 'Who wants to know?' Who are you? Find out who you are. And you can search for you endlessly, and never find out. Never. Everything that you get a kind of sensation of as being yourself will, upon examination, turn out to be something else. Something other.

And now let's work on the other direction. Go exactly the opposite way. What do you mean by something other? Let's find something other than me, and search for that. 'Well,' I say, 'all right. I can touch the ground here.' This is something other than me, and yet, I realize that my sensation of this soft carpet with something firm underneath it is a state of my nerve endings in my hand and in my muscles, which report to me that this is a softly covered

hardness, and that everything I feel about this carpet and the floor is a condition of my brain. In other words, when I feel this so-called external thing, I feel it only as it is as it were translated into states of my own body. All of you I see with your various shapes and colors, when I look out here, I am actually having an experience of how it feels inside my head. That's the place where I know you, and you know me, in your heads. So that I really do not have any sensations of anything other than myself, because whatever I do know, I have to translate it into a state of my own body in order to know it at all.

But do you see now what I have done? I carried in one direction the argument, where do I find my self? And it all turned out to be something other. Then I followed the question, how do I find something other, and it all turned out to be me. The same thing happens, for example, when you get into the old debates about fate and free will. When you discover that everything that you do is completely determinate. Then you suddenly have to wake up to the fact that the only real you is whatever it is that's determining what you do. I mean, if you say 'All that I do here and now is a result of the past. There have been processes in the past, going back and back and back, and my sitting here in this room and talking to you is simply the necessary effect of all that ever happened before.' Do you know what that's saying? It's saying that here in your presence talking to you is everything that ever happened before. That's me. Wowee, and so of course with you being here, if you want to figure it that way, because all this problem about causality is completely phony.

It's all based on this--that in order to talk about the world and think about it, we had to chop it up into bits, and we called those bits things and events. In the same way, if you want to eat chicken, you can't swallow a whole chicken unless you've got a huge mouth. So you cut it up into pieces, or you get a cut-up fryer from the store, but you don't get a cut-up fryer from an egg. Chicken comes whole out of the egg. So in the same way, the universe of nature doesn't come in bits or bites. It comes all in one piece. But to digest it, to absorb it into your mind, you've got to cut it into bits and take it in, as we say, one thing at a time. But that chopping of the world into these separate bits is like chopping up the chicken or carving the slices off the beef, or taking water out, cupful by cupful. You can handle it that way, but that's not the way it is.

So you have to see that the whole notion of there being particular, separate events, and particular, separate things, is nothing more than a calculus. A calculus. Calculus means 'pebbles.' Pebbles used for counting. So when we measure curves, we pretend as if they were a series of points, and the position of these points can be expressed in an arithmetical way, say by tracing a curve across a piece of finely calibrated graph paper. That's the basis of the calculus. So that a curve swings so many points across, so many down, etc., and so you feel you have control of the curve that way, you measure it, you know where it really goes. But where it really goes, you have set up this 'really' in terms of your other criss-cross system, and you said 'That's for real.' All it means is you've meshed two different systems, one on top of the other, and you're saying 'What I mean by reality is the systems of measurements that I've invented. The system of weights and measures. This thing is REALLY,' and you feel a great sense of confidence, 'exactly two pounds.' Now simply because you've made the two pounds of apples correspond with the weighing machine, which is a constant. Two pounds of apples, two pounds of grapes, different number of apples, different number of grapes, but you say 'That's really two pounds.'

But so, in just the same way, we say 'There are really different people. There are really different events.' But actually there aren't. I'm not saying that if we were to see the world in its truth, all of you different people would disappear, that your outlines would suddenly become vague, and you would turn into a solid lump of gelatinous goo. A lot of people think that's the way mystics see things. That's not at all what would happen. The thing I'm saying is this: we are all different, but we are as interrelated and indispensable to each other as the different organs in our body - stomach, heart, glands, bones, etc. Now you can argue that the stomach is fundamental--eating is the big thing, and therefore we grew brains as extensions of the stomach to get it more food. So that you say 'The brain is the servant of the stomach.' But you can argue equally that the brain is primary, and it has all these thinking games to play, and it needs a stomach as an appendage to supply it with energy. Or you can argue that the sex organs are primary and they need the brain and the stomach to keep that ecstasy going. But the brain and the stomach can equally argue that they wouldn't find it worthwhile going on unless they had the sex organ appendage to give them solace. The truth of the matter is that nobody comes first. No one pushes the other around. You don't find brains without stomachs and sex organs. They all go together - and this is the fallacy of Freud, in saying that the sexual apparatus are primary. It just goes along with the others.

So you don't have a universe in which a series or a collection of separate events or things are banging each other around like an enormous mass of billiard balls. You have a situation which is quite different from that, where what have hitherto been called 'causally related events,' to say that certain events are causally related is a very clumsy way of saying that these certain specific events which you have isolated as being causally related, were in fact really all parts of the same event.

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#### ALAN WATTS: SELF AND OTHER, pt 3 of 3

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In the previous session, I was discussing polarity and polar thinking as the key to understanding that our identity is more than the skin-encapsulated ego. Polar thinking is the crux, the essential tool for making the jump from feeling yourself to be something merely in this universe on the one hand, to the state of feeling, on the other hand, that you *are* this universe, focused and acting in that particular way that we call the human individual.

If you study the writings of the mystics, you will always find things in them that appear to be paradoxes, as in Zen, particularly. Empty-handed I go, yet a spade is in my hand. I walk on foot, and yet I'm riding on the back of an ox - and when crossing a bridge, the bridge flows, and the water stays still. Or when Jim drinks, John gets tipsy. Zen is full of paradoxes of this kind. Eckhart is full of sayings like this, 'The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me. The love with which I love God is the same love with which God loves me.' Things like that.

So this principle is explained in the sutra of the sixth patriarch. You know, the famous platform sutra of Whey-No he gives a long instruction on how to answer people's questions about Zen. He says 'If they ask you a question about something sacred, give them an answer in terms of the secular. If they ask about the secular, give them an answer in terms of the sacred.' So if somebody says 'What is buddha?' say 'This saucepan holds about a quart.' If they ask you about a saucepan, you say 'Why is my hand so much like the buddha's hand?'

And so that's the secret to understanding funny stories in Zen, that it's the same thing that - It's polarity. All these paradoxes are polarity thinking. Because what makes the difference between a person who has this type of cosmic or mystical consciousness - I don't like these words, but we haven't got a good word for this state of mind. Well, we'll have to put our heads together and invent something better. In academic circles, I call it 'ecological awareness,' because mysticism is a dirty word around the academy. So 'ecological awareness' does fairly well, except again, you always have to explain to people what ecology is; they don't know yet. Ecology is the science which deals with the relationships between organisms and their environments. Just as economics, in Greek, 'ecos,' is the 'home.' So economics, 'ecosnomos,' is the law of the home, and 'ecologos' is the logic of the home, and so the 'ecos,' the home of man, is the world. So ecology is man's relationship to the world, or a plant's relationship to its environment. All that kind of relationship, the study of the bee and flower bit, is ecology.

The thing that is so characteristic, then, of this new or different kind of consciousness, is that it starts from or has its foundation in awareness of relationship, of 'go withness,' that the inside of a situation goes with the outside, and although you may think from the point of view of ordinary consciousness, that they work independantly from each other; in this state of consciousness you see that they don't. In other words, it's slowly beginning to penetrate our ordinary consciousness. That what any individual does, and we ascribe to him as his behavior and praise him for it or blame him for it, everything that he does goes with what happens outside him. The behavior of the environment, and the behavior of that organism within that environment, is one behavior, and you mustn't think of this deterministically. That is to say, as if the organism were something merely subservient to the environment. Nor must you think the opposite way, that the environment is something that can be pushed around by the organism. When an organism starts looking as if it were pushing its environment around, it simply means that the environment/organism, the total field, is changing itself.

So there is no determinism in this, just as there is no idea of old-fashioned free will. You learn to see that there is simply one behavior pattern working, which we will call the organism-environment, and if you understand that, you undertand that YOU are this totality organism-environment, and so you are moving with it in the same way that all the organs of your physical body are moving together. As all the cells of the brain cooperate. You don't have to make them cooperate, you don't have to tell them to; you don't have to arrange a treaty of some kind, they just do so. So when birds fly, you notice particularly birds like sandpipers, when they turn suddenly in the air, they turn as if they were all one bird. Although when they land on the sand, they become individuals, and they run about independantly looking for worms. Then suddenly you shout at them, and they shoot into the air, and they're all one creature, moving as if it had a single mind. You know that haiku poem:

A hundred goods from the mind of one vine.

So just as we are organized that way, as organisms, so also we are, although not aware of it, organized that way collectively as individuals relating to each other and relating to the other forms of life, and to the geology, and the meteorological and astronomical phenomena around us. Only we haven't come to notice it. Our attention has been so fixed upon some of the

details of this relationship, that we have created a system of details as if it were a separate physical system. You understand, I've mentioned this, I'm sure, to many of you before, that human beings have for at least 3000 years specialized in one kind of attention only. That is what we call conscious attention, and that is a form of scanning the physical environment as if we were looking at it with a spotlight. And therefore, the nature of scanning is this: that it takes in the whole scene in series, bit by bit. Even if you don't go in a straight line, and you scan looking around you, you have a series of glimpses or glances piled up, and that gives you the history, in linear time, of your existence, because it's one experience of attention after another.

Now, in just the same way with all of us in this room exist totally together here and now, with all our innumerable physical organs, and every single one of our hairs, all present here. Nevertheless, we notice all this in series, and we come to imagine, therefore, that we live in time instead of in eternity, and so I have to resort to funny little tricks, like I was discussing yesterday, to show how the past is influenced by the future, because we screen that possibility out by the way we pay attention to things. We are absolutely befuddled with words, and you see, words follow the same linear pattern, because words are a notation. Conscious observation of the world by the spotlight always is accompanied by a notation. That is to say the notation of language, the notation of written letters, the notation of numbers, the notation of algebraical symbols, any kind of notation you want to think of. Musical notes--they do the same thing. And you notice what you can notate, and that is what is notable, noteworthy, because we observe and become aware consciously only of those things that we consider important. And what do you consider important? Well, that depends on your hobby. For which for most people is survival.

But when you get relaxed, when you get into the contemplative state, and you sit quietly--you know, you should try tea ceremony for this; this is a way of noticing everything. I mean, if suddenly realizing that what people consider important is that most of them are absolutely out of their minds. They are rushing around with piercing eyes looking into the future, trying to make livings, and then when they make the living, they don't know what to do with it, because they don't have time to enjoy it. I mean, after all, if you've got a business, and you're fleecing the public by putting out an inferior product and making scads of money doing this, then when you've made your money, all you have to buy is the inferior products of your competitors, and you've cheated yourself, because you didn't know how to live.

I'm getting ready to do a new television series on the contributions of Asia to the leisurely life and the good life. It's going to be about things like Chinese and Indian cooking; Japanese bathtubs, how to install one in the American home; how to do Japanese massage; how to make up your wife like a Hindu dancing girl; how to dress, what Asia has to contribute to comfortable clothes; all kinds of things like that. How to be civilized, yes, because we're [telling?] the American public that they're the richest country in the world and they don't know how to enjoy themselves. Really, the things that we are told are enjoyable, aren't, really. It will discuss, for example, things like the snow treatment, which is four couples--or four of anybody, for that matter--it's where an evening is set aside for one person to serve the other, wait on them hand and foot, and deliver them a glorious evening of dining, dancing, hot tubs, massage, lovemaking, everything, and you really knock

yourself out to do something beautiful for another person. But people don't do that sort of thing. I don't know why not, it's tremendous fun, for both parties involved. 'Snow,' is slang for heroin, and is used in this case as a joke, that this is the ultimate pleasure. So we say to 'snow' someone is to give them an absolutely royal time.

But this incapacity for--well, we could call it an incapacity for pleasure, and this tremendous preoccupation with time and with rush and with getting there, is a result of overspecialization in linear consciousness. Now, linear consciousness is indeed remarkable, but it is something in a way aggressive. Just as the sword, the cutting edge, is an aggressive instrument, as distinct from the total skin. With the total skin, you can feel all over, and in this way you embrace life. When you get into a hot tub, it goes all over your skin, and it's a type of diffused thing, what Freud called polymorphous erotic feeling, all over. Whereas conscious awareness is like the point of a pencil: it jabs, and it writes down precisely what. And so those people who are all conscious attention are sort of intellectual porcupines. They're all prickles into things, and that gives them an essentially hostile attitude toward life, because of course conscious attention is a troubleshooter. It's the radar in the human organism to watch out for changes in the environment, just as the radar of a ship is watching out for icebergs, and an airplane's radar is watching out for thunderclouds. So in the same way, our thing is going around like this, and it's serving a very valuable function. But if you identify yourself all entire with that part function, then you define yourself as being in trouble, and looking for trouble, and you become unaware of your generalized relationship with the external world.

So then, you don't see that other things are important, besides those things which are 'practical.' Nobody takes time off to look at these things, and Nan-sen, the Zen master, said 'most people look at these flowers as if they were in a dream.' That is to say, they were not awake, not looking at it at all. And people think, 'Well, they're pretty; they decorate the room; they have green leaves, and that's nice.' And once you get them to draw what they think it looks like, it doesn't look anything like it. You know, you draw a leaf, you make an outline like this, and you fill it up with green paint. But these aren't green. They're every color of the rainbow. If you look at any single leaf of this plant, and you look deeply enough, you will see the reflection of every color in the room in it. And you will begin to realize that if you contemplate long enough on the leaf of the flower, that it involves the whole universe.

You should watch for things like this, it's fascinating. Don't dismiss reflections as things that aren't there. When you walk into a room, you can see that not only do the windowpanes, and polished furniture, and people's spectacles, and people's eyeballs, not only do they reflect everything going on around you, also things pick up color. What color is the carpet? It depends on the light. You say, 'Well, it's a white carpet.' That's only because the windows aren't colored. If the windows were blue, it would be a blue carpet. 'But,' you say, 'a transparent window is of course a truer and more correct window than a blue one,' but is it? Why should it be? Why should so-called white glass be more real somehow than blue glass? Nobody ever answered that. So it's just that white glass is what we use most of the time, so we say that's more 'real' than what we would only use occasionally. But then in a dark room, the color of the carpet changes. When it's got shadows on it in a certain way, any painter can say 'that's no longer a white carpet. What color are these shadows? I don't know.

Some of them look gold.' So then you begin to realize through reflection that in a way, everything is reflection. That's quite a thought. We all feel that there are substantial things. The feeling of hardness I get when I shove my fist against something is exactly like the feeling of light when I meet something with my eyes.

The point is that the eyes are so sensitive that they can realize the concreteness of light. The ears are so sensitive that they can realize the concreteness of air vibrations and turn them into sound. The fingers are less sensitive, and they realize concreteness--that is, reality--in terms of touch, in terms of hardness. But all these things are reflections. That is to say-- Well, let's ask the question, is a rainbow real? Well, it fulfills all the categories of being there, because it fills all the categories of public observation. It isn't the hallucination of just one observer, because you can stand beside me and see the rainbow, too. But you just try to get ahold of that rainbow, approach it. I remember as a little boy, I'd ride my bicycle around chasing rainbow ends, and believing there might be a pot of gold at the end of it. But the irritating thing was, you could never catch up with the rainbow. Well, was it there, or wasn't it? Well, everybody saw it. But you see, it depends on a kind of triangulation between you and the sun and the moisture in the air, and if that triangulation doesn't exist, and if those three functions don't exist, there isn't any rainbow. Just like if I hit a drum, and I pound the hell out of it with no skin on the drum, it won't make any noise. In other words, for the drum to beat, needs both skin and a fist. If there's no skin, the drum doesn't make any noise; if there's no fist, the drum doesn't make any noise.

So in the same way, exactly, the hard floor made of stone is like a rainbow. It is there only if certain conditions of relationship are fulfilled. Now, we like to think, you see, that houses and things go on existing in their natural state when we're not around looking at them or feeling them. But what about the rainbow? Supposing that there's nobody to see it; would it be there? Or let me put it in another way. We're supporting the myth that the external world exists without us, but let's ask the question in another way. Supposing I was there, capable of seeing a rainbow, but there wasn't any sun out. It wouldn't be there, would it? Let's put it another way. Suppose the sun was out, and I was there to see it, but there wasn't any moisture in the atmosphere. It wouldn't be there, would it? So equally, it wouldn't be there if there was no one there to see it. It just as much depends on somebody to see it as it depends on the sun and it depends on the moisture.

But we try to pretend, you see, that the external world exists altogether independently of us. That's the whole myth of the independent observer, of man coming into a world into which he doesn't really belong, and that it's all going on there and he has nothing to do with it, but he just arrives in here and sees it as it always was. But that's a joke<sup>o</sup> and people could only feel that way if they felt completely alienated and did not feel that the external world was continuous with their own organism. You bet you the external world is so continuous with your own organism: the whole world is human because it's humaning.

There was a superstition in the 19th century to think of it some other way. Because, for example, when it was found out that the Earth was not the center of the cosmos, but that we were a small planet in a rather insignificant solar system, way out on the edge of a galaxy that certainly wasn't the biggest galaxy there was in all space, and people began to say, 'Oh, dear me. Man is nothing. He's merely a fungus on this little rock that goes around the sun,

and nature couldn't care less.' And so all the poets of the new 19th century philosophy of science said 'Man is nothing.' But at the same time, man was saying he was the spearhead of evolution, the farthest that life had progressed, and he was going to conquer nature, because he's just a poor little accident, and if he's going to make his way of life successful, he's got to fight all this nonsense around him, all these other creatures that aren't even civilized, and beat them into submission so they'll be civilized.

Well that's a big story; that's a fairy tale. You could equally say man is a mighty atom, tiny, way off in some funny corner of the universe--but don't forget, the universe has no corners. Everywhere in it is the middle, or can be regarded as such, just as I pointed out to you that any point on a sphere can be seen as the center of the surface of the sphere. So in the same way, anything in curved space can be seen as the middle of it all. And here in the middle of it all, once again the Earth has become the center of the cosmos. The infinitely mobile central point of all possible orbits. That was a joke phrase invented by Franz Verfeld(?) in his book 'Star of the Unborn.' But it really is. You can regard anywhere as central. So, here in the center is this extraordinary little being whose importance is not in his size--that's no criterion of value--but in his complexity, in his sensitivity, in the fact that these little germs, these tiny, tiny creatures we call people are each one of them essential to the existence of the whole cosmos. That's the sort of relation we have here between the great and the small, the macrocosm and the microcosm.

But you see, we don't think about it, because of a way-- We are all brought up within social forms which denied us. 'Little children should be seen and not heard.' When children come into this world, we put them down. You get used to that in infancy, and all your life through, you feel vaguely put down by reality. Government gives itself airs and graces, even in a democracy. The police are superbly rude to everybody else, just because they happen to be the instruments of the law. Incidentally, there's a very amusing article in a periodical called the 'East Village Other,' on policemen'ship, and what to do if you're detained by one of these officers of the law, how to behave. You must be respectful, that's the main point. You see, that attitude, that you are here on probation, on sufferance, that you don't matter, that you're not important to this whole thing at all, and that you could be wiped out any time and no one would miss you, is very, very deeply pushed into us by social institutions. Because we're afraid that if we taught people otherwise they would get too big for their boots. Well, of course they might, because they would be reacting against the old way of doing things. If you tell a person who's been put down all his life that he is in fact the lord god, he's liable to go off his rocker.

But the problem is that we have got a certain criterion of what to experience, and what to look at, and what is important, as a result of specialization of conscious attention alone, and with that goes the idea that the most important virtue in a living organism is aggression. We're terribly anxious if our kids aren't brought up to be aggressive. You know, you get a report about your boy from the school teacher telling you that Johnny's not aggressive enough. Well, you thought he was supposed to be integrated with the group, that's what they were talking about some time ago, and now they say he doesn't show aggression. Because the culture is aggressive; it's based, for example, you can-- Look at our taboos. We have no taboo against pictures of people being tortured and murdered, which are very unpleasant, but we do have a taboo against pictures of people making love. Why? We have the feeling, you

see, that everything to do with the glowing, flowing, glorious, warm participation of life is slightly sickening. Whereas where life is not participated in, but where there's kind of a sharp contact, why that's real. A lot of people don't really know they're here unless they hurt. And if you have any doubts in your conscious as to whether you're all right, so long as you're in pain you can be sure you are. Suffering is so good for you, because it builds character, and above all it tells you that you're here. I know people who like going to the dentist, because they get a great sense of reality from going to the dentist.

But, in the history of mankind, there have been all kinds of perfectly viable and successful cultures which didn't buy that story. The famous matriarchal cultures were always different in their attitude. They weren't afraid of pleasure. They wouldn't say that ecstasy was enfeebling. This is a system of values based on people for whom the object of existence is survival and conquest, and they say, 'Well, that is important,' and they cannot understand that survival might not be that important. Survival only seems to you that important when you think that your particular death is curtains. But if you see that the world goes on anyhow, and even supposing we were to blow up this planet tomorrow, completely, it'd be a matter of time, but the whole thing would soon be going again. Might not be in this solar system, or even in this galaxy, because simply what happened once can happen again. And it may take billions of years, but what's that in cosmic time? It'll go on. And if people see this, they won't blow it up. What will make us blow the planet up that the competition for survival is our anxiety for the whole thing. 'Oh, let's blow it up, because we can't bear sitting around wondering when it's going to happen. Get it over with.' And this is our difficulty.

So if you understand--let's carry this further now--that you are really the cosmos, and that you can't die, in that sense of you, you can disappear as an individual organism, yes, but that's only your surface. The real you can't die, so stop fooling around as if you could. You'll be relaxed and you'll be happy, and you won't start this tremendous project to assert your individuality over everybody else, just to tell you that you're really there; that's all they do. I mean, a person who goes out for power, who wants to feel that he's in control of all the things that are happening around him is simply somebody who is in a state of terror.

I was in a club in Dallas a few days ago, and I met a man who's alleged to be the richest man in the United States, and he looked miserable. But boy, does he have power. And of course, he's spending his life trying to prevent other people having any, especially his competitors. But he's miserable. He looks as if he had ulcers, and just terrible.

So this is a question of learning new values and learning them by letting up on this tremendously frantic kind of consciousness, which jumps from one thing to another and says 'What's next?' Now if you do this, for example, if you get out of that bind, you can take--I seem to be facing the carpet, so it forms a natural illustration--you can take the carpet, and in the ordinary way you would look at that and say 'Well, it's a nice carpet, it's all right, but it's mighty disorganized.' You know, all the hairs in it, and the tufts go this way and that way and so on. But if you see it the way I'm looking at it at the moment, it's not disorganized at all, because this is not chaos. This is-- I don't have any preconception about it, that it should be this way or it should be that way. This looks to me as beautiful as patterns in foam, or the way bark grows on a tree, or the way leaves scatter themselves across the surface of a pond. You see, we see all those things are beautiful, because the painters copy them and the

photographers enjoy photographing them. They never go wrong in their formations. Nor do you. Except from a certain point of view. Yes, I mean when we don't know that we don't go wrong, then we go wrong, because we get in a panic about what's going to happen to us. But if we do know that we don't go wrong, then we don't get in a panic, and we can live harmoniously.

But we're afraid, you see, to know that we don't go wrong, because we think that if we do that, we will lose our morals. But the only reason why people lose their morals is that they're scared. They can't trust life, or they can't trust others. They think that if you die or something like that, it will be terrible, it will be awful, it will be the end. So the fights. So the desperate efforts to make it all in one life, and that's greed. That's excessive protections of one's security. But if you are really open, and you start looking around, you suddenly see that you're in a world where everything is absolutely incredible. Not simply lovely things like these blossoms here, but also the dust on the floor, little wiggles, cracks, and the quality of light in things. That's what's so fascinating, the reflection of light on everything, because everything that exists is really a reflection of everything else. Reflection is ultimate. The reflection is a mirror, here, and when the curtain is drawn, it suddenly looks as if the Chrysler building is across the other side of the East River. You say, 'Well, it isn't really there, that's just a reflection.' But the Chrysler building on THAT side of the river is a reflection. Some reflection, but that's what it is. The whole world is just energy bouncing. What exists if it's not reflecting? That's the clue: reflection. The reflective life, the contemplatory life, is therefore wisdom.

[Alan Watts](http://deoxy.org) at [deoxy.org](http://deoxy.org)

# The Nature Of Consciousness

by Alan Watts

I find it a little difficult to say what the subject matter of this seminar is going to be, because it's too fundamental to give it a title. I'm going to talk about what there is. Now, the first thing, though, that we have to do is to get our perspectives with some background about the basic ideas that, as Westerners living today in the United States, influence our everyday common sense, our fundamental notions about what life is about. And there are historical origins for this, which influence us more strongly than most people realize. Ideas of the world which are built into the very nature of the language we use, and of our ideas of logic, and of what makes sense altogether.

And these basic ideas I call myth, not using the word 'myth' to mean simply something untrue, but to use the word 'myth' in a more powerful sense. A myth is an image in terms of which we try to make sense of the world. Now, for example, a myth in a way is a metaphor. If you want to explain electricity to someone who doesn't know anything about electricity, you say, well, you talk about an electric current. Now, the word 'current' is borrowed from rivers. It's borrowed from hydrolics, and so you explain electricity in terms of water. Now, electricity is not water, it behaves actually in a different way, but there are some ways in which the behavior of water is like the behavior of electricity, and so you explain it in terms of water. Or if you're an astronomer, and you want to explain to people what you mean by an expanding universe and curved space, you say, 'well, it's as if you have a black balloon, and there are white dots on the black balloon, and those dots represent galaxies, and as you blow the balloon up, uniformly all of them grow farther and farther apart. But you're using an analogy--the universe is not actually a black balloon with white dots on it.

So in the same way, we use these sort of images to try and make sense of the world, and we at present are living under the influence of two very powerful images, which are, in the present state of scientific knowledge, inadequate, and one of the major problems today are to find an adequate, satisfying image of the world. Well that's what I'm going to talk about. And I'm going to go further than that, not only what image of the world to have, but how we can get our sensations and our feelings in accordance with the most sensible image of the world that we can manage to conceive.

All right, now--the two images which we have been working under for 2000 years and maybe more are what I would call two models of the universe, and the first is called the ceramic model, and the second the fully automatic model. The ceramic model of the universe is based on the book of Genesis, from which Judaism, Islam, and Christianity derive their basic picture of the world. And the image of the world in the book of Genesis is that the world is an artifact. It is made, as a potter takes clay and forms pots out of it, or as a carpenter takes wood and makes tables and chairs out of it. Don't forget Jesus is the son of a carpenter. And also the son of God. So the image of God and of the world is based on the idea of God as a technician, potter, carpenter, architect, who has in mind a plan, and who fashions the universe in accordance with that plan.

So basic to this image of the world is the notion, you see, that the world consists of stuff, basically. Primordial matter, substance, stuff. As parts are made of clay. Now clay by itself has no intelligence. Clay does not of itself become a pot, although a good potter may think otherwise. Because if you were a really good potter, you don't impose your will on the clay, you ask any given lump of clay what it wants to become, and you help it to do that. And then you become a genius. But the ordinary idea I'm talking about is that simply clay is unintelligent; it's just stuff, and the potter imposes his will on it, and makes it become whatever he wants.

And so in the book of Genesis, the lord God creates Adam out of the dust of the Earth. In other words, he makes a clay figurine, and then he breathes into it, and it becomes alive. And because the clay become informed. By itself it is formless, it has no intelligence, and therefore it requires an external intelligence and an external energy to bring it to life and to bring some sense to it. And so in this way, we inherit a conception of ourselves as being artifacts, as being made, and it is perfectly natural in our culture for a child to ask its mother 'How was I made?' or 'Who made me?' And this is a very, very powerful idea, but for example, it is not shared by the Chinese, or by the Hindus. A Chinese child would not ask its mother 'How was I made?' A Chinese child might ask its mother 'How did I grow?' which is an entirely different procedure from making. You see, when you make something, you put it together, you arrange parts, or you work from the outside in, as a sculpture works on stone, or as a potter works on clay. But when you watch something growing, it works in exactly the opposite direction. It works from the inside to the outside. It expands. It burgeons. It blossoms. And it happens all of itself at once. In other words, the original simple form, say of a living cell in the womb, progressively complicates itself, and that's the growing process, and it's quite different from the making process.

But we have thought, historically, you see, of the world as something made, and the idea of being--trees, for example-- constructions, just as tables and houses are constructions. And so there is for that reason a fundamental difference between the made and the maker. And this image, this ceramic model of the universe, originated in cultures where the form of government was monarchical, and where, therefore, the maker of the universe was conceived also at the same time in the image of the king of the universe. 'King of kings, lords of lords, the only ruler of princes, who thus from thy throne behold all dwellers upon Earth.' I'm quoting the Book of Common Prayer. And so, all those people who are oriented to the universe in that way feel related to basic reality as a subject to a king. And so they are on very, very humble terms in relation to whatever it is that works all this thing. I find it odd, in the United States, that people who are citizens of a republic have a monarchical theory of the universe. That you can talk about the president of the United States as LBJ, or Ike, or Harry, but you can't talk about the lord of the universe in such familiar terms. Because we are carrying over from very ancient near-Eastern cultures, the notion that the lord of the universe must be respected in a certain way. People kneel, people bow, people prostrate themselves, and you know what the reason for that is: that nobody is more frightened of anybody else than a tyrant. He sits with his back to the wall, and his guards on either side of him, and he has you face downwards on the ground because you can't use weapons that way. When you come into his presence, you don't stand up and face him, because you might attack, and he has reason to fear that you might because he's ruling you all. And the man

who rules you all is the biggest crook in the bunch. Because he's the one who succeeded in crime. The other people are pushed aside because they--the criminals, the people we lock up in jail--are simply the people who didn't make it.

So naturally, the real boss sits with his back to the wall and his henchmen on either side of him. And so when you design a church, what does it look like? Catholic church, with the alter where it used to be--it's changing now, because the Catholic religion is changing. But the Catholic church has the alter with it's back to the wall at the east end of the church. And the alter is the throne and the priest is the chief vizier of the court, and he is making abeyance to the throne, but there is the throne of God, the alter. And all the people are facing it, and kneeling down. And a great Catholic cathederal is called a basilica, from the Greek 'basilikos,' which means 'king.' So a basilica is the house of a king, and the ritual of the church is based on the court rituals of Byzantium.

A Protestant church is a little different. Basically the same. The furniture of a Protestant church is based on a judicial courthouse. The pulpit, the judge in an American court wears a black robe, he wears exactly the same dress as a Protestant minister. And everybody sits in these boxes, there's a box for the jury, there's a box for the judge, there's a box for this, there's a box for that, and those are the pews in an ordinary colonial- type Protestant church. So both these kinds of churches which have an autocratic view of the nature of the universe decorate themselves, are architecturally constructed in accordance with political images of the universe. One is the king, and the other is the judge. Your honor. There's sense in this. When in court, you have to refer to the judge as 'your honor.' It stops the people engaged in litigation from losing their tempers and getting rude. There's a certain sense to that.

But when you want to apply that image to the universe itself, to the very nature of life, it has limitations. For one thing, the idea of a difference between matter and spirit. This idea doesn't work anymore. Long, long ago, physicists stopped asking the question 'What is matter?' They began that way. They wanted to know, what is the fundamental substance of the world? And the more they asked that question, the more they realized they couldn't answer it, because if you're going to say what matter is, you've got to describe it in terms of behavior, that is to say in terms of form, in terms of pattern. You tell what it does, you describe the smallest shapes of it which you can see. Do you see what happens? You look, say, at a piece of stone, and you want to say, 'Well, what is this piece of stone made of?' You take your microscope and you look at it, and instead of just this block of stuff, you see ever so many tinier shapes. Little crystals. So you say, 'Fine, so far so good. Now what are these crystals made of?' And you take a more powerful instrument, and you find that they're made of molecules, and then you take a still more powerful instrument to find out what the molecules are made of, and you begin to describe atoms, electrons, protons, mesons, all sorts of sub-nuclear particles. But you never, never arrive at the basic stuff. Because there isn't any.

What happens is this: 'Stuff' is a word for the world as it looks when our eyes are out of focus. Fuzzy. Stuff--the idea of stuff is that it is undifferentiated, like some kind of goo. And when your eyes are not in sharp focus, everything looks fuzzy. When you get your eyes into focus, you see a form, you see a pattern. But when you want to change the level of magnification, and go in closer and closer and closer, you get fuzzy again before you get

clear. So everytime you get fuzzy, you go through thinking there's some kind of stuff there. But when you get clear, you see a shape. So all that we can talk about is patterns. We never, never can talk about the 'stuff' of which these patterns are supposed to be made, because you don't really have to suppose that there is any. It's enough to talk about the world in terms of patterns. It describes anything that can be described, and you don't really have to suppose that there is some stuff that constitutes the essence of the pattern in the same way that clay constitutes the essence of pots. And so for this reason, you don't really have to suppose that the world is some kind of helpless, passive, unintelligent junk which an outside agency has to inform and make into intelligent shapes. So the picture of the world in the most sophisticated physics of today is not formed stuff--potted clay--but pattern. A self-moving, self-designing pattern. A dance. And our common sense as individuals hasn't yet caught up with this.

Well now, in the course of time, in the evolution of Western thought. The ceramic image of the world ran into trouble. And changed into what I call the fully automatic image of the world. In other words, Western science was based on the idea that there are laws of nature, and got that idea from Judaism and Christianity and Islam. That in other words, the potter, the maker of the world in the beginning of things laid down the laws, and the law of God, which is also the law of nature, is called the 'loggos.?,.' And in Christianity, the loggos is the second person of the trinity, incarnate as Jesus Christ, who thereby is the perfect exemplar of the divine law. So we have tended to think of all natural phenomena as responding to laws, as if, in other words, the laws of the world were like the rails on which a streetcar or a tram or a train runs, and these things exist in a certain way, and all events respond to these laws. You know that limerick,

There was a young man who said 'Damn, For it certainly seems that I am A creature that moves In determinate grooves. I'm not even a bus, I'm a tram.'

So here's this idea that there's kind of a plan, and everything responds and obeys that plan. Well, in the 18th century, Western intellectuals began to suspect this idea. And what they suspected was whether there is a lawmaker, whether there is an architect of the universe, and they found out, or they reasoned, that you don't have to suppose that there is. Why? Because the hypothesis of God does not help us to make any predictions. Nor does it-- In other words, let's put it this way: if the business of science is to make predictions about what's going to happen, science is essentially prophecy. What's going to happen? By examining the behavior of the past and describing it carefully, we can make predictions about what's going to happen in the future. That's really the whole of science. And to do this, and to make successful predictions, you do not need God as a hypothesis. Because it makes no difference to anything. If you say 'Everything is controlled by God, everything is governed by God,' that doesn't make any difference to your prediction of what's going to happen. And so what they did was drop that hypothesis. But they kept the hypothesis of law. Because if you can predict, if you can study the past and describe how things have behaved, and you've got some regularities in the behavior of the universe, you call that law. Although it may not be law in the ordinary sense of the word, it's simply regularity.

And so what they did was got rid of the lawmaker and kept the law. And so the conceived the universe in terms of a mechanism. Something, in other words, that is functioning

according to regular, clocklike mechanical principles. Newton's whole image of the world is based on billiards. The atoms are billiard balls, and they bang each other around. And so your behavior, every individual around, is defined as a very, very complex arrangement of billiard balls being banged around by everything else. And so behind the fully automatic model of the universe is the notion that reality itself is, to use the favorite term of 19th century scientists, blind energy. In say the metaphysics of Ernst Hegel, and T.H. Huxley, the world is basically nothing but energy--blind, unintelligent force. And likewise and parallel to this, in the philosophy of Freud, the basic psychological energy is libido, which is blind lust. And it is only a fluke, it is only as a result of pure chances that resulting from the exuberance of this energy there are people. With values, with reason, with languages, with cultures, and with love. Just a fluke. Like, you know, 1000 monkeys typing on 1000 typewriters for a million years will eventually type the Encyclopedia Britannica. And of course the moment they stop typing the Encyclopedia Britannica, they will relapse into nonsense.

And so in order that that shall not happen, for you and I are flukes in this cosmos, and we like our way of life--we like being human--if we want to keep it, say these people, we've got to fight nature, because it will turn us back into nonsense the moment we let it. So we've got to impose our will upon this world as if we were something completely alien to it. From outside. And so we get a culture based on the idea of the war between man and nature. And we talk about the conquest of space. The conquest of Everest. And the great symbols of our culture are the rocket and the bulldozer. The rocket--you know, compensation for the sexually inadequate male. So we're going to conquer space. You know we're in space already, way out. If anybody cared to be sensitive and let outside space come to you, you can, if your eyes are clear enough. Aided by telescopes, aided by radio astronomy, aided by all the kinds of sensitive instruments we can devise. We're as far out in space as we're ever going to get. But, y'know, sensitivity isn't the pitch. Especially in the WASP culture of the United States. We define manliness in terms of aggression, you see, because we're a little bit frightened as to whether or not we're really men. And so we put on this great show of being a tough guy. It's completely unnecessary. If you have what it takes, you don't need to put on that show. And you don't need to beat nature into submission. Why be hostile to nature? Because after all, you ARE a symptom of nature. You, as a human being, you grow out of this physical universe in exactly the same way an apple grows off an apple tree.

So let's say the tree which grows apples is a tree which apples, using 'apple' as a verb. And a world in which human beings arrive is a world that peoples. And so the existence of people is symptomatic of the kind of universe we live in. Just as spots on somebody's skin is symptomatic of chicken pox. Just as hair on a head is symptomatic of what's going on in the organism. But we have been brought up by reason of our two great myths--the ceramic and the automatic--not to feel that we belong in the world. So our popular speech reflects it. You say 'I came into this world.' You didn't. You came out of it. You say 'Face facts.' We talk about 'encounters' with reality, as if it was a head-on meeting of completely alien agencies. And the average person has the sensation that he is a someone that exists inside a bag of skin. The center of consciousness that looks out at this thing, and what the hell's it going to do to me? You see? 'I recognize you, you kind of look like me, and I've seen myself in a mirror, and you look like you might be people.' So maybe you're intelligent and maybe you

can love, too. Perhaps you're all right, some of you are, anyway. You've got the right color of skin, or you have the right religion, or whatever it is, you're OK. But there are all those people over in Asia, and Africa, and they may not really be people. When you want to destroy someone, you always define them as 'unpeople.' Not really human. Monkeys, maybe. Idiots, maybe. Machines, maybe, but not people.

So we have this hostility to the external world because of the superstition, the myth, the absolutely unfounded theory that you, yourself, exist only inside your skin. Now I want to propose another idea altogether. There are two great theories in astronomy going on right now about the origination of the universe. One is called the explosion theory, and the other is called the steady state theory. The steady state people say there never was a time when the world began, it's always expanding, yes, but as a result of free hydrogen in space, the free hydrogen coagulates and makes new galaxies. But the other people say there was a primordial explosion, an enormous bang billions of years ago which flung all the galaxies into space. Well let's take that just for the sake of argument and say that was the way it happened.

It's like you took a bottle of ink and you threw it at a wall. Smash! And all that ink spread. And in the middle, it's dense, isn't it? And as it gets out on the edge, the little droplets get finer and finer and make more complicated patterns, see? So in the same way, there was a big bang at the beginning of things and it spread. And you and I, sitting here in this room, as complicated human beings, are way, way out on the fringe of that bang. We are the complicated little patterns on the end of it. Very interesting. But so we define ourselves as being only that. If you think that you are only inside your skin, you define yourself as one very complicated little curlique, way out on the edge of that explosion. Way out in space, and way out in time. Billions of years ago, you were a big bang, but now you're a complicated human being. And then we cut ourselves off, and don't feel that we're still the big bang. But you are. Depends how you define yourself. You are actually--if this is the way things started, if there was a big bang in the beginning-- you're not something that's a result of the big bang. You're not something that is a sort of puppet on the end of the process. You are still the process. You are the big bang, the original force of the universe, coming on as whoever you are. When I meet you, I see not just what you define yourself as--Mr so-and-so, Ms so-and-so, Mrs so-and-so--I see every one of you as the primordial energy of the universe coming on at me in this particular way. I know I'm that, too. But we've learned to define ourselves as separate from it.

And so what I would call a basic problem we've got to go through first, is to understand that there are no such things as things. That is to say separate things, or separate events. That that is only a way of talking. If you can understand this, you're going to have no further problems. I once asked a group of high school children 'What do you mean by a thing?' First of all, they gave me all sorts of synonyms. They said 'It's an object,' which is simply another word for a thing; it doesn't tell you anything about what you mean by a thing. Finally, a very smart girl from Italy, who was in the group, said a thing is a noun. And she was quite right. A noun isn't a part of nature, it's a part of speech. There are no nouns in the physical world. There are no separate things in the physical world, either. The physical world is wiggly. Clouds, mountains, trees, people, are all wiggly. And only when human beings get to working on things--they build buildings in straight lines, and try to make out that the world

isn't really wiggly. But here we are, sitting in this room all built out of straight lines, but each one of us is as wiggly as all get-out.

Now then, when you want to get control of something that wiggles, it's pretty difficult, isn't it? You try and pick up a fish in your hands, and the fish is wiggly and it slips out. What do you do to get hold of the fish? You use a net. And so the net is the basic thing we have for getting hold of the wiggly world. So if you want to get hold of this wiggle, you've got to put a net over it. A net is something regular. And I can number the holes in a net. So many holes up, so many holes across. And if I can number these holes, I can count exactly where each wiggle is, in terms of a hole in that net. And that's the beginning of calculus, the art of measuring the world. But in order to do that, I've got to break up the wiggle into bits. I've got to call this a specific bit, and this the next bit of the wiggle, and this the next bit, and this the next bit of the wiggle. And so these bits are things or events. Bit of wiggles. Which I mark out in order to talk about the wiggle. In order to measure and therefore in order to control it. But in nature, in fact, in the physical world, the wiggle isn't bitted. Like you don't get a cut-up fryer out of an egg. But you have to cut the chicken up in order to eat it. You bite it. But it doesn't come bitten.

So the world doesn't come thinged; it doesn't come evented. You and I are all as much continuous with the physical universe as a wave is continuous with the ocean. The ocean waves, and the universe peoples. And as I wave and say to you 'Yoo-hoo!' the world is waving with me at you and saying 'Hi! I'm here!' But we are consciousness of the way we feel and sense our existence. Being based on a myth that we are made, that we are parts, that we are things, our consciousness has been influenced, so that each one of us does not feel that. We have been hypnotized, literally hypnotized by social convention into feeling and sensing that we exist only inside our skins. That we are not the original bang, just something out on the end of it. And therefore we are scared stiff. My wave is going to disappear, and I'm going to die! And that would be awful. We've got a mythology going now which is, as Father Maskell.?, put it, we are something that happens between the maternity ward and the crematorium. And that's it. And therefore everybody feels unhappy and miserable.

This is what people really believe today. You may go to church, you may say you believe in this, that, and the other, but you don't. Even Jehovah's Witnesses, who are the most fundamental of fundamentalists, they are polite when they come around and knock on the door. But if you REALLY believed in Christianity, you would be screaming in the streets. But nobody does. You would be taking full- page ads in the paper every day. You would be the most terrifying television programs. The churches would be going out of their minds if they really believed what they teach. But they don't. They think they ought to believe what they teach. They believe they should believe, but they don't really believe it, because what we REALLY believe is the fully automatic model. And that is our basic, plausible common sense. You are a fluke. You are a separate event. And you run from the maternity ward to the crematorium, and that's it, baby. That's it.

Now why does anybody think that way? There's no reason to, because it isn't even scientific. It's just a myth. And it's invented by people who want to feel a certain way. They want to play a certain game. The game of god got embarrassing. The idea if God as the potter, as the architect of the universe, is good. It makes you feel that life is, after all, important. There is

someone who cares. It has meaning, it has sense, and you are valuable in the eyes of the father. But after a while, it gets embarrassing, and you realize that everything you do is being watched by God. He knows your tiniest innermost feelings and thoughts, and you say after a while, 'Quit bugging me! I don't want you around.' So you become an atheist, just to get rid of him. Then you feel terrible after that, because you got rid of God, but that means you got rid of yourself. You're nothing but a machine. And your idea that you're a machine is just a machine, too. So if you're a smart kid, you commit suicide. Camus said there is only one serious philosophical question, which is whether or not to commit suicide. I think there are four or five serious philosophical questions. The first one is 'Who started it?' The second is 'Are we going to make it?' The third is 'Where are we going to put it?' The fourth is 'Who's going to clean up?' And the fifth, 'Is it serious?'

But still, should you or not commit suicide? This is a good question. Why go on? And you only go on if the game is worth the gamble. Now the universe has been going on for an incredible long time. And so really, a satisfactory theory of the universe has to be one that's worth betting on. That's very, it seems to me, elementary common sense. If you make a theory of the universe which isn't worth betting on, why bother? Just commit suicide. But if you want to go on playing the game, you've got to have an optimal theory for playing the game. Otherwise there's no point in it. But the people who coined the fully automatic theory of the universe were playing a very funny game, for what they wanted to say was this: all you people who believe in religion--old ladies and wishful thinkers-- you've got a big daddy up there, and you want comfort, but life is rough. Life is tough, as success goes to the most hard-headed people. That was a very convenient theory when the European and American worlds were colonizing the natives everywhere else. They said 'We're the end product of evolution, and we're tough. I'm a big strong guy because I face facts, and life is just a bunch of junk, and I'm going to impose my will on it and turn it into something else. I'm real hard.' That's a way of flattering yourself.

And so, it has become academically plausible and fashionable that this is the way the world works. In academic circles, no other theory of the world than the fully automatic model is respectable. Because if you're an academic person, you've got to be an intellectually tough person, you've got to be prickly. There are basically two kinds of philosophy. One's called prickles, the other's called goo. And prickly people are precise, rigorous, logical. They like everything chopped up and clear. Goo people like it vague. For example, in physics, prickly people believe that the ultimate constituents of matter are particles. Goo people believe it's waves. And in philosophy, prickly people are logical positivists, and goo people are idealists. And they're always arguing with each other, but what they don't realize is neither one can take his position without the other person. Because you wouldn't know you advocated prickles unless there was someone advocating goo. You wouldn't know what a prickle was unless you knew what a goo was. Because life isn't either prickles or goo, it's either gooey prickles or prickly goo. They go together like back and front, male and female. And that's the answer to philosophy. You see, I'm a philosopher, and I'm not going to argue very much, because if you don't argue with me, I don't know what I think. So if we argue, I say 'Thank you,' because owing to the courtesy of your taking a different point of view, I understand what I mean. So I can't get rid of you.

But however, you see, this whole idea that the universe is nothing at all but unintelligent

force playing around and not even enjoying it is a putdown theory of the world. People who had an advantage to make, a game to play by putting it down, and making out that because they put the world down they were a superior kind of people. So that just won't do. We've had it. Because if you seriously go along with this idea of the world, you're what is technically called alienated. You feel hostile to the world. You feel that the world is a trap. It is a mechanism, it is electronic and neurological mechanisms into which you somehow got caught. And you, poor thing, have to put up with being put into a body that's falling apart, that gets cancer, that gets the great Siberian itch, and is just terrible. And these mechanics--doctors--are trying to help you out, but they really can't succeed in the end, and you're just going to fall apart, and it's a grim business, and it's just too bad. So if you think that's the way things are, you might as well commit suicide right now. Unless you say, 'Well, I'm damned. Because there might really be after all eternal damnation. Or I identify with my children, and I think of them going on without me and nobody to support them. Because if I do go on in this frame of mind and continue to support them, I shall teach them to be like I am, and they'll go on, dragging it out to support their children, and they won't enjoy it. They'll be afraid to commit suicide, and so will their children. They'll all learn the same lessons.'

So you see, all I'm trying to say is that the basic common sense about the nature of the world that is influencing most people in the United States today is simply a myth. If you want to say that the idea of God the father with his white beard on the golden throne is a myth, in a bad sense of the word 'myth,' so is this other one. It is just as phony and has just as little to support it as being the true state of affairs. Why? Let's get this clear. If there is any such thing at all as intelligence and love and beauty, well you've found it in other people. In other words, it exists in us as human beings. And as I said, if it is there, in us, it is symptomatic of the scheme of things. We are as symptomatic of the scheme of things as the apples are symptomatic of the apple tree or the rose of the rose bush. The Earth is not a big rock infested with living organisms any more than your skeleton is bones infested with cells. The Earth is geological, yes, but this geological entity grows people, and our existence on the Earth is a symptom of this other system, and its balances, as much as the solar system in turn is a symptom of our galaxy, and our galaxy in its turn is a symptom of a whole company of other galaxies. Goodness only knows what that's in.

But you see, when, as a scientist, you describe the behavior of a living organism, you try to say what a person does, it's the only way in which you can describe what a person is, describe what they do. Then you find out that in making this description, you cannot confine yourself to what happens inside the skin. In other words, you cannot talk about a person walking unless you start describing the floor, because when I walk, I don't just dangle my legs in empty space. I move in relationship to a room. So in order to describe what I'm doing when I'm walking, I have to describe the room; I have to describe the territory. So in describing my talking at the moment, I can't describe it as just a thing in itself, because I'm talking to you. And so what I'm doing at the moment is not completely described unless your being here is described also. So if that is necessary, in other words, in order to describe MY behavior, I have to describe YOUR behavior and the behavior of the environment, it means that we've really got one system of behavior. Your skin doesn't separate you from the world; it's a bridge through which the external world flows into you, and you flow into it.

Just, for example, as a whirlpool in water, you could say because you have a skin you have a definite shape you have a definite form. All right? Here is a flow of water, and suddenly it does a whirlpool, and it goes on. The whirlpool is a definite form, but no water stays put in it. The whirlpool is something the stream is doing, and exactly the same way, the whole universe is doing each one of us, and I see each one of you today and I recognize you tomorrow, just as I would recognize a whirlpool in a stream. I'd say 'Oh yes, I've seen that whirlpool before, it's just near so-and-so's house on the edge of the river, and it's always there.' So in the same way when I meet you tomorrow, I recognize you, you're the same whirlpool you were yesterday. But you're moving. The whole world is moving through you, all the cosmic rays, all the food you're eating, the stream of steaks and milk and eggs and everything is just flowing right through you. When you're wiggling the same way, the world is wiggling, the stream is wiggling you.

But the problem is, you see, we haven't been taught to feel that way. The myths underlying our culture and underlying our common sense have not taught us to feel identical with the universe, but only parts of it, only in it, only confronting it--aliens. And we are, I think, quite urgently in need of coming to feel that we ARE the eternal universe, each one of us. Otherwise we're going to go out of our heads. We're going to commit suicide, collectively, courtesy of H-bombs. And, all right, supposing we do, well that will be that, then there will be life making experiments on other galaxies. Maybe they'll find a better game.

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#### ALAN WATTS: THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS, part 2 of 3

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Well now, in the first session this afternoon, I was discussing two of the great myths or models of the universe, which lie in the intellectual and psychological background of all of us. The myth of the world as a political, monarchial state in which we are all here on sufferance as subject to God. In which we are MADE artifacts, who do not exist in our own right. God alone, in the first myth, exists in his own right, and you exist as a favor, and you ought to be grateful. Like your parents come on and say to you, 'Look at all the things we've done for you, all the money we spent to send you to college, and you turn out to be a beatnik. You're a wretched, ungrateful child.' And you're supposed to say, 'Sorry, I really am.' But you're definitely in the position of being on probation. This arises out of our whole attitude towards children, whereby we don't really acknowledge that they're human. Instead, when a child comes into the world, and as soon as it can communicate in any way, talk language, you should say to a child, 'How do you do? Welcome to the human race. Now my dear, we are playing a very complicated game, and we're going to explain the rules of it to you. And when you have learned these rules and understand what they are, you may be able to invent better ones. But in the meantime, this is the thing we're doing.'

Instead of that, we either treat a child with a kind of with a kind of 'blah-blah-blah' attitude, or 'coochy-coochy-coochie,' y'know? and don't treat the thing as a human being at all--as a kind of doll. Or else as a nuisance. And so all of us, having been treated that way, carry over into adult life the sense of being on probation here. Either the god is somebody who says to us 'coochy-coochy-coochie,' or 'blah-blah-blah.' And that's the feeling we carry over. So that idea of the royal god, the king of kings and the lord of lords which we inherit from the political structures of the Tigres-Euphrates cultures, and from Egypt. The Pharoah, Amenhotep IV is probably, as Freud suggested, the original author of Moses' monotheism,

and certainly the Jewish law code comes from Hammarabi in Chaldea. And these men lived in a culture where the pyramid and the ziggurat--the ziggurat is the Chaldean version of the pyramid, indicating somehow a hierarchy of power, from the boss on down. And God, in this first myth that we've been discussing, the ceramic myth is the boss, and the idea of God is that the universe is governed from above.

But do you see, this parallels--goes hand in hand with the idea that you govern your own body. That the ego, which lies somewhere between the ears and behind the eyes in the brain, is the governor of the body. And so we can't understand a system of order, a system of life, in which there isn't a governor. 'O Lord, our governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world.'

But supposing, on the contrary, there could be a system which doesn't have a governor. That's what we are supposed to have in this society. We are supposed to be a democracy and a republic. And we are supposed to govern ourselves. As I said, it's so funny that Americans can be politically republican--I don't mean republican in the party sense--and yet religiously monarchical. It's a real strange contradiction.

So what is this universe? Is it a monarchy? Is it a republic? Is it a mechanism? Or an organism? Because you see, if it's a mechanism, either it's a mere mechanism, as in the fully automatic model, or else it's a mechanism under the control of a driver. A mechanic. If it's not that, it's an organism, and an organism is a thing that governs itself. In your body there is no boss. You could argue, for example, that the brain is a gadget evolved by the stomach, in order to serve the stomach for the purposes of getting food. Or you can argue that the stomach is a gadget evolved by the brain to feed it and keep it alive. Whose game is this? Is it the brain's game, or the stomach's game? They're mutual. The brain implies the stomach and the stomach implies the brain, and neither of them is the boss.

You know that story about all the limbs of the body. The hand said 'We do all our work,' the feet said 'We do our work,' the mouth said 'We do all the chewing, and here's this lazy stomach who just gets it all and doesn't do a thing. He didn't do any work, so let's go on strike.' And the hands refused to carry, the feet refused to walk, the teeth refused to chew, and said 'Now we're on strike against the stomach.' But after a while, all of them found themselves getting weaker and weaker and weaker, because they didn't realize that the stomach fed them.

So there is the possibility then that we are not in the kind of system that these two myths delineate. That we are not living in a world where we ourselves, in the deepest sense of self, are outside reality, and somehow in a position that we have to bow down to it and say 'As a great favor, please preserve us in existence.' Nor are we in a system which is merely mechanical, and which we are nothing but flukes, trapped in the electrical wiring of a nervous system which is fundamentally rather inefficiently arranged. What's the alternative? Well, we could put the alternative in another image altogether, and I'll call this not the ceramic image, not the fully automatic image, but the dramatic image. Consider the world as a drama. What's the basis of all drama? The basis of all stories, of all plots, of all happenings--is the game of hide and seek. You get a baby, what's the fundamental first game you play with a baby? You put a book in front of your face, and you peek at the baby.

The baby starts giggling. Because the baby is close to the origins of life; it comes from the womb really knowing what it's all about, but it can't put it into words. See, what every child psychologist really wants to know is to get a baby to talk psychological jargon, and explain how it feels. But the baby knows; you do this, this, this and this, and the baby starts laughing, because the baby is a recent incarnation of God. And the baby knows, therefore, that hide and seek is the basic game.

See, when we were children, we were taught '1, 2, 3,' and 'A, B, C,' but we weren't set down on our mothers' knees and taught the game of black and white. That's the thing that was left out of all our educations, the game that I was trying to explain with these wave diagrams. That life is not a conflict between opposites, but a polarity. The difference between a conflict and a polarity is simply--when you think about opposite things, we sometimes use the expression, 'These two things are the poles apart.' You say, for example, about someone with whom you totally disagree, 'I am the poles apart from this person.' But your very saying that gives the show away. Poles. Poles are the opposite ends of one magnet. And if you take a magnet, say you have a magnetized bar, there's a north pole and a south pole. Okay, chop off the south pole, move it away. The piece you've got left creates a new south pole. You never get rid of the south pole. So the point about a magnet is, things may be the poles apart, but they go together. You can't have the one without the other. We are imagining a diagram of the universe in which the idea of polarity is the opposite ends of the diameter, north and south, you see? That's the basic idea of polarity, but what we're trying to imagine is the encounter of forces that come from absolutely opposed realms, that have nothing in common. When we say of two personality types that they're the poles apart. We are trying to think eccentrically, instead of concentrically. And so in this way, we haven't realized that life and death, black and white, good and evil, being and non-being, come from the same center. They imply each other, so that you wouldn't know the one without the other.

Now I'm not saying that that's bad, that's fun. You're playing the game that you don't know that black and white imply each other. Therefore you think that black possibly might win, that the light might go out, that the sound might never be heard again. That there could be the possibility of a universe of pure tragedy, of endless, endless darkness. Wouldn't that be awful? Only you wouldn't know it was awful, if that's what happened. The point that we all forget is that the black and the white go together, and there isn't the one without the other. At the same time, you see, we forget, in the same way as we forget that these two go together.

The other thing we forget, is that self and other go together, in just the same way as the two poles of a magnet. You say 'I, myself; I am me; I am this individual; I am this particular, unique instance.' What is other is everything else. All of you, all of the stars, all of the galaxies, way, way out into infinite space, that's other. But in the same way as black implies white, self implies other. And you don't exist without all that, so that where you get these polarities, you get this sort of difference, that what we call explicitly, or exoterically, they're different. But implicitly, esoterically, they're one. Since you can't have the one without the other, that shows there's a kind of inner conspiracy between all pairs of opposites, which is not in the open, but it's tacit. It's like you say 'Well, there are all sorts of things that we understand among each other tacitly, that we don't want to admit, but we do recognize tacitly there's a kind of secret between us boys and girls,' or whatever it may be. And we recognize

that. So, tacitly, all of you really inwardly know--although you won't admit it because your culture has trained you in a contrary direction--all of you really inwardly know that you as an individual self are inseparable from everything else that exists, that you are a special case in the universe. But the whole game, especially of Western culture, is to conceal that from ourselves, so that when anybody in our culture slips into the state of consciousness where they suddenly find this to be true, and they come on and say 'I'm God,' we say 'You're insane.'

Now, it's very difficult--you can very easily slip into the state of consciousness where you feel you're God; it can happen to anyone. Just in the same way as you can get the flu, or measles, or something like that, you can slip into this state of consciousness. And when you get it, it depends upon your background and your training as to how you're going to interpret it. If you've got the idea of god that comes from popular Christianity, God as the governor, the political head of the world, and you think you're God, then you say to everybody, 'You should bow down and worship me.' But if you're a member of Hindu culture, and you suddenly tell all your friends 'I'm God,' instead of saying 'You're insane,' they say 'Congratulations! At last, you found out.' Because their idea of god is not the autocratic governor. When they make images of Shiva, he has ten arms. How would you use ten arms? It's hard enough to use two. You know, if you play the organ, you've got to use your two feet and your two hands, and you play different rhythms with each member. It's kind of tricky. But actually we're all masters at this, because how do you grow each hair without having to think about it? Each nerve? How do you beat your heart and digest with your stomach at the same time? You don't have to think about it. In your very body, you are omnipotent in the true sense of omnipotence, which is that you are able to be omni-potent; you are able to do all these things without having to think about it.

When I was a child, I used to ask my mother all sorts of ridiculous questions, which of course every child asks, and when she got bored with my questions, she said 'Darling, there are just some things which we are not meant to know.' I said 'Will we ever know?' She said 'Yes, of course, when we die and go to heaven, God will make everything plain.' So I used to imagine on wet afternoons in heaven, we'd all sit around the throne of grace and say to God, 'Well why did you do this, and why did you do that?' and he would explain it to us. 'Heavenly father, why are the leaves green?' and he would say 'Because of the chlorophyll,' and we'd say 'Oh.' But in the Hindu universe, you would say to God, 'How did you make the mountains?' and he would say 'Well, I just did it. Because when you're asking me how did I make the mountains, you're asking me to describe in words how I made the mountains, and there are no words which can do this. Words cannot tell you how I made the mountains any more than I can drink the ocean with a fork. A fork may be useful for sticking into a piece of something and eating it, but it's of no use for imbibing the ocean. It would take millions of years. In other words, it would take millions of years, and you would be bored with my description, long before I got through it, if I put it to you in words, because I didn't create the mountains with words, I just did it. Like you open and close your hand. You know how you do this, but can you describe in words how you do it? Even a very good physiologist can't describe it in words. But you do it. You're conscious, aren't you. Don't you know how you manage to be conscious? Do you know how you beat your heart? Can you say in words, explain correctly how this is done? You do it, but you can't put it into words, because words

are too clumsy, yet you manage this expertly for as long as you're able to do it.'

But you see, we are playing a game. The game runs like this: the only thing you really know is what you can put into words. Let's suppose I love some girl, rapturously, and somebody says to me, 'Do you REALLY love her?' Well, how am I going to prove this? They'll say, 'Write poetry. Tell us all how much you love her. Then we'll believe you.' So if I'm an artist, and can put this into words, and can convince everybody I've written the most ecstatic love letter ever written, they say 'All right, ok, we admit it, you really do love her.' But supposing you're not very articulate, are we going to tell you you DON'T love her? Surely not. You don't have to be Heloise and Abyla to be in love. But the whole game that our culture is playing is that nothing really happens unless it's in the newspaper. So when we're at a party, and it's a great party, somebody says 'Too bad we didn't bring a camera. Too bad there wasn't a tape recorder. And so our children begin to feel that they don't exist authentically unless they get their names in the papers, and the fastest way to get your name in the paper is to commit a crime. Then you'll be photographed, and you'll appear in court, and everybody will notice you. And you're THERE. So you're not there unless you're recorded. It really happened if it was recorded. In other words, if you shout, and it doesn't come back and echo, it didn't happen. Well that's a real hangup. It's true, the fun with echos; we all like singing in the bathtub, because there's more resonance there. And when we play a musical instrument, like a violin or a cello, it has a sounding box, because that gives resonance to the sound. And in the same way, the cortex of the human brain enables us when we're happy to know that we're happy, and that gives a certain resonance to it. If you're happy, and you don't know you're happy, there's nobody home.

But this is the whole problem for us. Several thousand years ago, human beings devolved the system of self-consciousness, and they knew, they knew.

There was a young man who said 'though  
It seems that I know that I know,  
What I would like to see  
Is the I that sees me  
When I know that I know that I know.'

And this is the human problem: we know that we know. And so, there came a point in our evolution where we didn't guide life by distrusting our instincts. Suppose that you could live absolutely spontaneously. You don't make any plans, you just live like you feel like it. And you say 'What a gas that is, I don't have to make any plans, anything. I don't worry; I just do what comes naturally.'

The way the animals live, everybody envies them, because look, a cat, when it walks--did you ever see a cat making an aesthetic mistake. Did you ever see a badly formed cloud? Were the stars ever misarranged? When you watch the foam breaking on the seashore, did it ever make a bad pattern? Never. And yet we think in what we do, we make mistakes. And we're worried about that. So there came this point in human evolution when we lost our innocence. When we lost this thing that the cats and the flowers have, and had to think about

it, and had to purposely arrange and discipline and push our lives around in accordance with foresight and words and systems of symbols, accountancy, calculation and so on, and then we worry. Once you start thinking about things, you worry as to if you thought enough. Did you really take all the details into consideration? Was every fact properly reviewed? And by jove, the more you think about it, the more you realize you really couldn't take everything into consideration, because all the variables in every decision are incalculable, so you get anxiety. And this, though, also, is the price you pay for knowing that you know. For being able to think about thinking, being able to feel about feeling. And so you're in this funny position.

Now then, do you see that this is simultaneously an advantage and a terrible disadvantage? What has happened here is that by having a certain kind of consciousness, a certain kind of reflexive consciousness--being aware of being aware. Being able to represent what goes on fundamentally in terms of a system of symbols, such as words, such as numbers. You put, as it were, two lives together at once, one representing the other. The symbols representing the reality, the money representing the wealth, and if you don't realize that the symbol is really secondary, it doesn't have the same value. People go to the supermarket, and they get a whole cartload of goodies and they drive it through, then the clerk fixes up the counter and this long tape comes out, and he'll say '\$30, please,' and everybody feels depressed, because they give away \$30 worth of paper, but they've got a cartload of goodies. They don't think about that, they think they've just lost \$30. But you've got the real wealth in the cart, all you've parted with is the paper. Because the paper in our system becomes more valuable than the wealth. It represents power, potentiality, whereas the wealth, you think oh well, that's just necessary; you've got to eat. That's to be really mixed up.

So then. If you awaken from this illusion, and you understand that black implies white, self implies other, life implies death--or shall I say, death implies life--you can conceive yourself. Not conceive, but FEEL yourself, not as a stranger in the world, not as someone here on sufferance, on probation, not as something that has arrived here by fluke, but you can begin to feel your own existence as absolutely fundamental. What you are basically, deep, deep down, far, far in, is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself. So, say in Hindu mythology, they say that the world is the drama of God. God is not something in Hindu mythology with a white beard that sits on a throne, that has royal perogatives. God in Indian mythology is the self, 'Satchitananda.' Which means 'sat,' that which is, 'chit,' that which is consciousness; that which is 'ananda' is bliss. In other words, what exists, reality itself is gorgeous, it is the fullness of total joy. Wowee! And all those stars, if you look out in the sky, is a firework display like you see on the fourth of July, which is a great occasion for celebration; the universe is a celebration, it is a fireworks show to celebrate that existence is. Wowee.

And then they say, 'But, however, there's no point in just sustaining bliss.' Let's suppose you were able, every night, to dream any dream you wanted to dream, and that you could for example have the power to dream in one night 75 years worth of time. Or any length of time you wanted to have. And you would, naturally, as you began on this adventure of dreams, fulfill all your wishes. You would have every kind of pleasure you could conceive. And after several nights of 75 years of total pleasure each, you would say 'Well, that was pretty great. But now let's have a surprise. Let's have a dream which isn't under control, where

something is going to happen to me that I don't know what it's going to be.' And you would dig that, and come out of it and say 'That was a close shave, now wasn't it?' Then you would get more and more adventurous, and you would make further and further gambles as to what you would dream, and finally you would dream where you are now. You would dream the dream of the life that you are actually living today. That would be within the infinite multiplicity of the choices you would have. Of playing that you weren't God. Because the whole nature of the godhead, according to this idea, is to play that he's not. The first thing that he says to himself is 'Man, get lost,' because he gives himself away. The nature of love is self-abandonment, not clinging to oneself. Throwing yourself out, for instance as in basketball; you're always getting rid of the ball. You say to the other fellow 'Have a ball.' See? And that keeps things moving. That's the nature of life.

So in this idea, then, everybody is fundamentally the ultimate reality. Not God in a politically kingly sense, but God in the sense of being the self, the deep-down basic whatever there is. And you're all that, only you're pretending you're not. And it's perfectly OK to pretend you're not, to be perfectly convinced, because this is the whole notion of drama. When you come into the theater, there is an arch, and a stage, and down there is the audience. Everybody assumes their seats in the theater, gone to see a comedy, a tragedy, a thriller, whatever it is, and they all know as they come in and pay their admissions, that what is going to happen on the stage is not for real. But the actors have a conspiracy against this, because they're going to try and persuade the audience that what is happening on the stage IS for real. They want to get everybody sitting on the edge of their chairs, they want you terrified, or crying, or laughing. Absolutely captivated by the drama. And if a skillful human actor can take in an audience and make people cry, think what the cosmic actor can do. Why he can take himself in completely. He can play so much for real that he thinks he really is. Like you sitting in this room, you think you're really here. Well, you've persuaded yourself that way. You've acted it so damn well that you KNOW that this is the real world. But you're playing it. As well, the audience and the actor as one. Because behind the stage is the green room, offscene, where the actors take off their masks. Do you know that the word 'person' means 'mask'? The 'persona' which is the mask worn by actors in Greco-Roman drama, because it has a megaphone-type mouth which throws the sound out in an open-air theater. So the 'per'--through--'sona'--what the sound comes through--that's the mask. How to be a real person. How to be a genuine fake. So the 'dramatis persona' at the beginning of a play is the list of masks that the actors will wear. And so in the course of forgetting that this world is a drama, the word for the role, the word for the mask has come to mean who you are genuinely. The person. The proper person. Incidentally, the word 'parson' is derived from the word 'person.' The 'person' of the village. The 'person' around town, the parson.

So anyway, then, this is a drama, and what I want you to is-- I'm not trying to sell you on this idea in the sense of converting you to it; I want you to play with it. I want you to think of its possibilities. I'm not trying to prove it, I'm just putting it forward as a possibility of life to think about. So then, this means that you're not victims of a scheme of things, of a mechanical world, or of an autocratic god. The life you're living is what YOU have put yourself into. Only you don't admit it, because you want to play the game that it's happened to you. In other words, I got mixed up in this world; I had a father who got hot pants over a girl, and she was my mother, and because he was just a horny old man, and as a result of

that, I got born, and I blame him for it and say 'Well that's your fault; you've got to look after me,' and he says 'I don't see why I should look after you; you're just a result.' But let's suppose we admit that I really wanted to get born, and that I WAS the ugly gleam in my father's eye when he approached my mother. That was me. I was desire. And I deliberately got involved in this thing. Look at it that way instead. And that really, even if I got myself into an awful mess, and I got born with syphilis, and the great Siberian itch, and tuberculosis in a Nazi concentration camp, nevertheless this was a game, which was a very far out play. It was a kind of cosmic masochism. But I did it.

Isn't that an optimal game rule for life? Because if you play life on the supposition that you're a helpless little puppet that got involved. Or you played on the supposition that it's a frightful, serious risk, and that we really ought to do something about it, and so on, it's a drag. There's no point in going on living unless we make the assumption that the situation of life is optimal. That really and truly we're all in a state of total bliss and delight, but we're going to pretend we aren't just for kicks. In other words, you play non-bliss in order to be able to experience bliss. And you can go as far out in non-bliss as you want to go. And when you wake up, it'll be great. You know, you can slam yourself on the head with a hammer because it's so nice when you stop. And it makes you realize how great things are when you forget that's the way it is. And that's just like black and white: you don't know black unless you know white; you don't know white unless you know black. This is simply fundamental.

So then, here's the drama. My metaphysics, let me be perfectly frank with you, are that there the central self, you can call it God, you can call it anything you like, and it's all of us. It's playing all the parts of all being whatsoever everywhere and anywhere. And it's playing the game of hide and seek with itself. It gets lost, it gets involved in the farthest-out adventures, but in the end it always wakes up and comes back to itself. And when you're ready to wake up, you're going to wake up, and if you're not ready you're going to stay pretending that you're just a 'poor little me.' And since you're all here and engaged in this sort of enquiry and listening to this sort of lecture, I assume you're all in the process of waking up. Or else you're pleasing yourselves with some kind of flirtation with waking up which you're not serious about. But I assume that you are maybe not serious, but sincere, that you are ready to wake up.

So then, when you're in the way of waking up, and finding out who you are, you meet a character called a guru, as the Hindus say 'the teacher,' 'the awakener.' And what is the function of a guru? He's the man that looks you in the eye and says 'Oh come off it. I know who you are.' You come to the guru and say 'Sir, I have a problem. I'm unhappy, and I want to get one up on the universe. I want to become enlightened. I want spiritual wisdom.' The guru looks at you and says 'Who are you?' You know Sri-Ramana-Maharshi, that great Hindu sage of modern times? People used to come to him and say 'Master, who was I in my last incarnation?' As if that mattered. And he would say 'Who is asking the question?' And he'd look at you and say, go right down to it, 'You're looking at me, you're looking out, and you're unaware of what's behind your eyes. Go back in and find out who you are, where the question comes from, why you ask.' And if you've looked at a photograph of that man--I have a gorgeous photograph of him; I look by it every time I go out the front door. And I look at those eyes, and the humor in them; the lilting laugh that says 'Oh come off it. Shiva, I recognize you. When you come to my door and say 'I'm so-and-so,' I say 'Ha-ha, what a

funny way God has come on today."

So eventually--there are all sorts of tricks of course that gurus play. They say 'Well, we're going to put you through the mill.' And the reason they do that is simply that you won't wake up until you feel you've paid a price for it. In other words, the sense of guilt that one has. Or the sense of anxiety. It's simply the way one experiences keeping the game of disguise going on. Do you see that? Supposing you say 'I feel guilty.' Christianity makes you feel guilty for existing. That somehow the very fact that you exist is an affront. You are a fallen human being. I remember as a child when we went to the serves of the church on Good Friday. They gave us each a colored postcard with Jesus crucified on it, and it said underneath 'This I have done for thee. What doest thou for me?' You felt awful. YOU had nailed that man to the cross. Because you eat steak, you have crucified Christ. Mythra. It's the same mystery. And what are you going to do about that? 'This I have done for thee, what doest thou for me?' You feel awful that you exist at all. But that sense of guilt is the veil across the sanctuary. 'Don't you DARE come in!' In all mysteries, when you are going to be initiated, there's somebody saying 'Ah-ah-ah, don't you come in. You've got to fulfill this requirement and that requirement, THEN we'll let you in.' And so you go through the mill. Why? Because you're saying to yourself 'I won't wake up until I deserve it. I won't wake up until I've made it difficult for me to wake up. So I invent for myself an elaborate system of delaying my waking up. I put myself through this test and that test, and when I convince myself it's sufficiently arduous, THEN I at last admit to myself who I really am, and draw aside the veil and realize that after all, when all is said and done, I am that I am, which is the name of god.'

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#### ALAN WATTS: THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS, pt 3 of 3

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In last night's session, I was discussing an alternative myth to the Ceramic and Fully Automatic models of the universe, I'll call the Dramatic Myth. The idea that life as we experience it is a big act, and that behind this big act is the player, and the player, or the self, as it's called in Hindu philosophy, the *\_atman\_*, is you. Only you are playing hide and seek, since that is the essential game that is going on. The game of games. The basis of all games, hide and seek. And since you're playing hide & seek, you are deliberately, although you can't admit this--or won't admit it--you are deliberately forgetting who you really are, or what you really are. And the knowledge that your essential self is the foundation of the universe, the 'ground of being' as Tillich calls it, is something you have that the Germans call a *\_hintengedanka\_*[?] A *\_hintengedanka\_* is a thought way, way, way in the back of your mind. Something that you know deep down but can't admit.

So, in a way, then, in order to bring this to the front, in order to know that is the case, you have to be kidded out of your game. And so what I want to discuss this morning is how this happens. Although before doing so, I must go a little bit further into the whole nature of this problem.

You see, the problem is this. We identify in our experience a differentiation between what we do and what happens to us. We have a certain number of actions that we define as voluntary, and we feel in control of those. And then over against that, there is all those things that are involuntary. But the dividing line between these two is very inarbitrary. Because for

example, when you move your hand, you feel that you decide whether to open it or to close it. But then ask yourself how do you decide? When you decide to open your hand, do you first decide to decide? You don't, do you? You just decide, and how do you do that? And if you don't know how to do it, is it voluntary or involuntary? Let's consider breathing. You can feel that you breath deliberately; you don't control your breath. But when you don't think about it, it goes on. Is it voluntary or involuntary?

So, we come to have a very arbitrary definition of self. That much of my activity which I feel I do. And that then doesn't include breathing most of the time; it doesn't include the heartbeats; it doesn't include the activity of the glands; it doesn't include digestion; it doesn't include how you shape your bones; circulate your blood. Do you or do you not do these things? Now if you get with yourself and you find out you are all of yourself, a very strange thing happens. You find out that your body knows that you are one with the universe. In other words, the so-called involuntary circulation of your blood is one continuous process with the stars shining. If you find out it's YOU who circulates your blood, you will at the same moment find out that you are shining the sun. Because your physical organism is one continous process with everything else that's going on. Just as the waves are continuous with the ocean. Your body is continuous with the total energy system of the cosmos, and it's all you. Only you're playing the game that you're only this bit of it. But as I tried to explain, there are in physical reality no such thing as separate events.

So then. Remember also when I tried to work towards a definition of omnipotence. Omnipotence is not knowing how everything is done; it's just doing it. You don't have to translate it into language. Supposing that when you got up in the morning, you had to switch your brain on. And you had to think and do as a deliberate process waking up all the circuits that you need for active life during hte day. Why, you'd never get done! Because you have to do all those things at once. That's why the Buddhists and Hindus represent their gods as many-armed. How could you use so many arms at once? How could a centipede control a hundred legs at once? Because it doesn't think about it. In the same way, you are unconsciously performing all the various activities of your organism. Only unconsciously isn't a good word, because it sounds sort of dead. Superconsciously would be better. Give it a plus rather than a minus.

Because what consciousness is is a rather specialized form of awareness. When you look around the room, you are conscious of as much as you can notice, and you see an enormous number of things which you do not notice. For example, I look at a girl here and somebody asks me later 'What was she wearing?' I may not know, although I've seen, because I didn't attend. But I was aware. You see? And perhaps if I could under hypnosis be asked this question, where I would get my conscious attention out of the way by being in the hypnotic state, I could recall what dress she was wearing.

So then, just in the same way as you don't know--you don't focus your attention--on how you make your thyroid gland function, so in the same way, you don't have any attention focused on how you shine the sun. So then, let me connect this with the problem of birth and death, which puzzles people enormously of course. Because, in order to understand what the self is, you have to remember that it doesn't need to remember anything, just as you don't need to know how you work your thyroid gland.

So then, when you die, you're not going to have to put up with everlasting non-existence, because that's not an experience. A lot of people are afraid that when they die, they're going to be locked up in a dark room forever, and sort of undergo that. But one of the interesting things in the world is--this is a yoga, this is a realization--try and imagine what it will be like to go to sleep and never wake up. Think about that. Children think about it. It's one of the great wonders of life. What will it be like to go to sleep and never wake up? And if you think long enough about that, something will happen to you. You will find out, among other things, it will pose the next question to you. What was it like to wake up after having never gone to sleep? That was when you were born. You see, you can't have an experience of nothing; nature abhors a vacuum. So after you're dead, the only thing that can happen is the same experience, or the same sort of experience as when you were born. In other words, we all know very well that after other people die, other people are born. And they're all you, only you can only experience it one at a time. Everybody is I, you all know you're you, and wheresoever all being exist throughout all galaxies, it doesn't make any difference. You are all of them. And when they come into being, that's you coming into being.

You know that very well, only you don't have to remember the past in the same way you don't have to think about how you work your thyroid gland, or whatever else it is in your organism. You don't have to know how to shine the sun. You just do it, like you breath. Doesn't it really astonish you that you are this fantastically complex thing, and that you're doing all this and you never had any education in how to do it? Never learned, but you're this miracle? The point of it is, from a strictly physical, scientific standpoint, this organism is a continuous energy with everything else that's going on. And if I am my foot, I am the sun. Only we've got this little partial view. We've got the idea that 'No, I'm something IN this body.' The ego. That's a joke. The ego is nothing other than the focus of conscious attention. It's like the radar on a ship. The radar on a ship is a troubleshooter. Is there anything in the way? And conscious attention is a designed function of the brain to scan the environment, like a radar does, and note for any troublemaking changes. But if you identify yourself with your troubleshooter, then naturally you define yourself as being in a perpetual state of anxiety. And the moment we cease to identify with the ego and become aware that we are the whole organism, we realize first thing how harmonious it all is. Because your organism is a miracle of harmony. All these things functioning together. Even those creatures that are fighting each other in the blood stream and eating each other up. If they weren't doing that, you wouldn't be healthy.

So what is discord at one level of your being is harmony at another level. And you begin to realize that, and you begin to be aware too, that the discords of your life and the discords of people's lives, which are a discord at one level, at a higher level of the universe are healthy and harmonious. And you suddenly realize that everything you are and do is at that level as magnificent and as free of any blemish as the patterns in waves. The markings in marble. The way a cat moves. And that this world is really OK. Can't be anything else, because otherwise it couldn't exist. And I don't mean this in a kind of Pollyanna Christian Science sense. I don't know what it is or why it is about Christian Science, but it's prissy. It's got kind of a funny feeling to it; came from New England.

But the reality underneath physical existence, or which really is physical existence--because

in my philosophy there is no difference between the physical and the spiritual. These are absolutely out-of-date categories. It's all process; it isn't 'stuff' on the one hand and 'form' on the other. It's just pattern-- life is pattern. It is a dance of energy. And so I will never invoke spooky knowledge. That is, that I've had a private revelation or that I have sensory vibrations going on a plane which you don't have. Everything is standing right out in the open, it's just a question of how you look at it. So you do discover when you realize this, the most extraordinary thing that I never cease to be flabbergasted at whenever it happens to me. Some people will use a symbolism of the relationship of God to the universe, wherein God is a brilliant light, only somehow veiled, hiding underneath all these forms as you look around you. So far so good. But the truth is funnier than that. It is that you are looking right at the brilliant light now that the experience you are having that you call ordinary everyday consciousness--pretending you're not it--that experience is exactly the same thing as 'it.' There's no difference at all. And when you find that out, you laugh yourself silly. That's the great discovery.

In other words, when you really start to see things, and you look at an old paper cup, and you go into the nature of what it is to see what vision is, or what smell is, or what touch is, you realize that that vision of the paper cup is the brilliant light of the cosmos. Nothing could be brighter. Ten thousand suns couldn't be brighter. Only they're hidden in the sense that all the points of the infinite light are so tiny when you see them in the cup they don't blow your eyes out. See, the source of all light is in the eye. If there were no eyes in this world, the sun would not be light. So if I hit as hard as I can on a drum which has no skin, it makes no noise. So if a sun shines on a world with no eyes, it's like a hand beating on a skinless drum. No light. YOU evoke light out of the universe, in the same way you, by nature of having a soft skin, evoke hardness out of wood. Wood is only hard in relation to a soft skin. It's your eardrum that evokes noise out of the air. You, by being this organism, call into being this whole universe of light and color and hardness and heaviness and everything.

But in the mythology that we sold ourselves on at the end of the 19th century, when people discovered how big the universe was, and that we live on a little planet in a solar system on the edge of the galaxy, which is a minor galaxy, everybody thought, 'Uuuuugh, we're really unimportant after all. God isn't there and doesn't love us, and nature doesn't give a damn.' And we put ourselves down. But actually, it's this funny little microbe, tiny thing, crawling on this little planet that's way out somewhere, who has the ingenuity, by nature of this magnificent organic structure, to evoke the whole universe out of what otherwise would be mere quanta. There's jazz going on. But you see, this ingenious little organism is not merely some stranger in this. This little organism, on this little planet, is what the whole show is growing there, and so realizing it's own presence. Does it through you, and you're it.

When you put a chicken's beak on a chalk line, it gets stuck; it's hypnotized. So in the same way, when you learn to pay attention, and as children you know how all the teachers were in class: 'Pay attention!!' And all the kids stare at the teacher. And we've got to pay attention. That's putting your nose on the chalk line. And you got stuck with the idea of attention, and you thought attention was Me, the ego, attention. So if you start attending to attention, you realize what the hoax is. That's why in Aldous Huxley's book 'Island,' the Roger had trained the myna birds on the island to say 'Attention! Here and now, boys!' See? Realize who you are. Come to, wake up!

Well, here's the problem: if this is the state of affairs which is so, and if the conscious state you're in this moment is the same thing as what we might call the Divine State. If you do anything to make it different, it shows that you don't understand that it's so. So the moment you start practicing yoga, or praying or meditating, or indulging in some sort of spiritual cultivation, you are getting in your own way.

Now this is the Buddhist trick: the buddha said 'We suffer because we desire. If you can give up desire, you won't suffer.' But he didn't say that as the last word; he said that as the opening step of a dialogue. Because if you say that to someone, they're going to come back after a while and say 'Yes, but now I'm desiring not to desire.' And so the buddha will answer, 'Well at last you're beginning to understand the point.' Because you can't give up desire. Why would you try to do that? It's already desire. So in the same way you say 'You ought to be unselfish' or to give up you ego. Let go, relax. Why do you want to do that? Just because it's another way of beating the game, isn't it? The moment you hypothesize that you are different from the universe, you want to get one up on it. But if you try to get one up on the universe, and you're in competition with it, that means you don't understand you ARE it. You think there's a real difference between 'self' and 'other.' But 'self,' what you call yourself, and what you call 'other' are mutually necessary to each other like back and front. They're really one. But just as a magnet polarizes itself at north and south, but it's all one magnet, so experience polarizes itself as self and other, but it's all one. If you try to make the south pole defeat the north pole, or get the mastery of it, you show you don't know what's going on.

So there are two ways of playing the game. The first way, which is the usual way, is that a guru or teacher who wants to get this across to somebody because he knows it himself, and when you know it you'd like others to see it, too. So what he does is, he gets you into being ridiculous harder and more assiduously than usual. In other words, if you are in a contest with the universe, he's going to stir up that contest until it becomes ridiculous. And so he sets you such tasks as saying-- Now of course, in order to be a true person, you must give up yourself, be unselfish. So the lord steps down out of heaven and says 'The first and great commandment is `Thou shalt love the lord thy god.' You must love me.' Well that's a double-bind. You can't love on purpose. You can't be sincere purposely. It's like trying not to think of a green elephant while taking medicine.

But if a person really tries to do it--and this is the way Christianity is rigged--you should be very sorry for your sins. And though everybody knows they're not, but they think they ought to be, they go around trying to be penitent. Or trying to be humble. And they know the more assiduously they practice it, the phonier and phonier the whole thing gets. So in Zen Buddhism, exactly the same thing happens. The Zen master challenges you to be spontaneous. 'Show me the real you.' One way they do this getting you to shout. Shout the word 'moo.' And he says 'I want to hear YOU in that shout. I want to hear your whole being in it.' And you yell your lungs out and he says 'Pfft. That's no good. That's just a fake shout. Now I want to hear absolutely the whole of your being, right from the heart of the universe, come through in this shout.' And these guys scream themselves hoarse. Nothing happens. Until one day they get so desperate they give up trying and they manage to get that shout through, when they weren't trying to be genuine. Because there was nothing else to do, you just had to yell.

And so in this way--it's called the technique of *reductio ad absurdum*. If you think you have a problem, and you're an ego and you're in difficulty, the answer the Zen master makes to you is 'Show me your ego. I want to see this thing that has a problem.' When Bodhidharma, the legendary founder of Zen, came to China, a disciple came to him and said 'I have no peace of mind. Please pacify my mind.' And Bodhidharma said 'Bring out your mind here before me and I'll pacify it.' 'Well,' he said, 'when I look for it, I can't find it.' So Bodhidharma said 'There, it's pacified.' See? Because when you look for your own mind, that is to say, your own particularized center of being which is separate from everything else, you won't be able to find it. But the only way you'll know it isn't there is if you look for it hard enough, to find out that it isn't there. And so everybody says 'All right, know yourself, look within, find out who you are.' Because the harder you look, you won't be able to find it, and then you'll realize it isn't there at all. There isn't a separate you. Your mind is what there is. Everything. But the only way to find that out is to persist in the state of delusion as hard as possible. That's one way. I haven't said the only way, but it is one way.

So almost all spiritual disciplines, meditations, prayers, etc, etc, are ways of persisting in folly. Doing resolutely and consistently what you're doing already. So if a person believes that the Earth is flat, you can't talk him out of that. He knows it's flat. Look out the window and see; it's obvious, it looks flat. So the only way to convince him it isn't is to say 'Well let's go and find the edge.' And in order to find the edge, you've got to be very careful not to walk in circles, you'll never find it that way. So we've got to go consistently in a straight line due west along the same line of latitude, and eventually when we get back to where we started from, you've convinced the guy that the world is round. That's the only way that will teach him. Because people can't be talked out of illusions.

There is another possibility, however. But this is more difficult to describe. Let's say we take as the basic supposition--which is the thing that one sees in the experience of *satori* or awakening, or whatever you want to call it--that this now moment in which I'm talking and you're listening, is eternity. That although we have somehow conned ourselves into the notion that this moment is ordinary, and that we may not feel very well, we're sort of vaguely frustrated and worried and so on, and that it ought to be changed. This is it. So you don't need to do anything at all. But the difficulty about explaining that is that you mustn't try and not do anything, because that's doing something. It's just the way it is. In other words, what's required is a sort of act of super relaxation; it's not ordinary relaxation. It's not just letting go, as when you lie down on the floor and imagine that you're heavy so you get into a state of muscular relaxation. It's not like that. It's being with yourself as you are without altering anything. And how to explain that? Because there's nothing to explain. It is the way it is now. See? And if you understand that, it will automatically wake you up.

So that's why Zen teachers use shock treatment, to sometimes hit them or shout at them or create a sudden surprise. Because it is that jolt that suddenly brings you here. See, there's no road to here, because you're already there. If you ask me 'How am I going to get here?' It will be like the famous story of the American tourist in England. The tourist asked some yokel the way to Upper Tuttenham, a little village. And the yokel scratched his head and he said 'Well, sir, I don't know where it is, but if I were you, I wouldn't start from here.'

So you see, when you ask 'How do I obtain the knowledge of God, how do I obtain the

knowledge of liberation?' all I can say is it's the wrong question. Why do you want to obtain it? Because the very fact that you're wanting to obtain it is the only thing that prevents you from getting there. You already have it. But of course, it's up to you. It's your privilege to pretend that you don't. That's your game; that's your life game; that's what makes you think you're an ego. And when you want to wake up, you will, just like that. If you're not awake, it shows you don't want to. You're still playing the hide part of the game. You're still, as it were, the self pretending it's not the self. And that's what you want to do. So you see, in that way, too, you're already there.

So when you understand this, a funny thing happens, and some people misinterpret it. You'll discover as this happens that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary behavior disappears. You will realize that what you describe as things under your own will feel exactly the same as things going on outside you. You watch other people moving, and you know you're doing that, just like you're breathing or circulating your blood. And if you don't understand what's going on, you're liable to get crazy at this point, and to feel that you are god in the Jehovah sense. To say that you actually have power over other people, so that you can alter what you're doing. And that you're omnipotent in a very crude, literal kind of bible sense. You see? A lot of people feel that and they go crazy. They put them away. They think they're Jesus Christ and that everybody ought to fall down and worship them. That's only they got their wires crossed. This experience happened to them, but they don't know how to interpret it. So be careful of that. Jung calls it inflation. People who get the Holy Man syndrome, that I suddenly discover that I am the lord and that I am above good and evil and so on, and therefore I start giving myself airs and graces. But the point is, everybody else is, too. If you discover that you are that, then you ought to know that everybody else is.

For example, let's see in other ways how you might realize this. Most people think when they open their eyes and look around, that what they're seeing is outside. It seems, doesn't it, that you are behind your eyes, and that behind the eyes there is a blank you can't see at all. You turn around and there's something else in front of you. But behind the eyes there seems to be something that has no color. It isn't dark, it isn't light. It is there from a tactile standpoint; you can feel it with your fingers, but you can't get inside it. But what is that behind your eyes? Well actually, when you look out there and see all these people and things sitting around, that's how it feels inside your head. The color of this room is back here in the nervous system, where the optical nerves are at the back of the head. It's in there. It's what you're experiencing. What you see out here is a neurological experience. Now if that hits you, and you feel sensuously that that's so, you may feel therefore that the external world is all inside my skull. You've got to correct that, with the thought that your skull is also in the external world. So you suddenly begin to feel 'Wow, what kind of situation is this? It's inside me, and I'm inside it, and it's inside me, and I'm inside it.' But that's the way it is.

This is the what you could call transaction, rather than interaction between the individual and the world. Just like, for example, in buying and selling. There cannot be an act of buying unless there is simultaneously an act of selling, and vice versa. So the relationship between the environment and the organism is transactional. The environment grows the organism, and in turn the organism creates the environment. The organism turns the sun into light, but it requires there be an environment containing a sun for there to be an organism at

all. And the answer to it simply is they're all one process. It isn't that organisms by chance came into the world. This world is the sort of environment which grows organisms. It was that way from the beginning. The organisms may in time have arrived in the scene or out of the scene later than the beginning of the scene, but from the moment it went BANG! in the beginning, if that's the way it started, organisms like us are sitting here. We're involved in it.

Look here, we take the propagation of an electric current. I can have an electric current running through a wire that goes all the way around the Earth. And here we have a power source, and here we have a switch. A positive pole, a negative pole. Now, before that switch closes, the current doesn't exactly behave like water in a pipe. There isn't current here, waiting, to jump the gap as soon as the switch is closed. The current doesn't even start until the switch is closed. It never starts unless the point of arrival is there. Now, it'll take an interval for that current to get going in its circuit if it's going all the way around the Earth. It's a long run. But the finishing point has to be closed before it will even start from the beginning. In a similar way, even though in the development of any physical system there may be billions of years between the creation of the most primitive form of energy and then the arrival of intelligent life, that billions of years is just the same thing as the trip of that current around the wire. Takes a bit of time. But it's already implied. It takes time for an acorn to turn into an oak, but the oak is already implied in the acorn. And so in any lump of rock floating about in space, there is implicit human intelligence. Sometime, somehow, somewhere. They all go together.

So don't differentiate yourself and stand off and say 'I am a living organism in a world made of a lot of dead junk, rocks and stuff.' It all goes together. Those rocks are just as much you as your fingernails. You need rocks. What are you going to stand on?

What I think an awakening really involves is a re-examination of our common sense. We've got all sorts of ideas built into us which seem unquestioned, obvious. And our speech reflects them; its commonest phrases. 'Face the facts.' As if they were outside you. As if life were something they simply encountered as a foreigner. 'Face the facts.' Our common sense has been rigged, you see? So that we feel strangers and aliens in this world, and this is terribly plausible, simply because this is what we are used to. That's the only reason. But when you really start questioning this, say 'Is that the way I have to assume life is? I know everybody does, but does that make it true?' It doesn't necessarily. It ain't necessarily so. So then as you question this basic assumption that underlies our culture, you find you get a new kind of common sense. It becomes absolutely obvious to you that you are continuous with the universe.

For example, people used to believe that planets were supported in the sky by being imbedded in crystal spheres, and everybody knew that. Why, you could see the crystal spheres there because you could look right through them. It was obviously made of crystal, and something had to keep them up there. And then when the astronomers suggested that there weren't any crystal spheres, people got terrified, because then they thought the stars would fall down. Nowadays, it doesn't bother anybody. They thought, too, when they found out the Earth was spherical, people who lived in the antiquities would fall off, and that was scary. But then somebody sailed around the world, and we all got used to it, we travel around in jet planes and everything. We have no problem feeling that the Earth is globular.

None whatever. We got used to it.

So in the same way Einstein's relativity theories--the curvature of the propagation of light, the idea that time gets older as light moves away from a source, in other words, people looking at the world now on Mars, they would be seeing the state of the world a little earlier than we are now experiencing it. That began to bother people when Einstein started talking about that. But now we're all used to it, and relativity and things like that are a matter of common sense today. Well, in a few years, it will be a matter of common sense to many people that they're one with the universe. It'll be so simple. And then maybe if that happens, we shall be in a position to handle our technology with more sense. With love instead of with hate for our environment.

[Alan Watts at deoxy.org](#)

# The Value of Psychotic Experience

by Alan Watts

I think most of you know from the announcement of this series of seminars and workshops during the summer, they're entitled 'The Value of Psychotic Experience.' And many people who are interested in an entirely new approach to problems of what have hitherto been called mental health are participating in these seminars and workshops, and doing something which is extremely dangerous and in a way revolutionary. For this reason:

We are living in a world where deviant opinions about religion are no longer dangerous, because no one takes religion seriously, and therefore you can be like Bishop Pike and question the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the reality of the virgin birth, and the physical resurrection of Jesus, and still remain a bishop in good standing. But what you can't get away with today, or at least you have great difficulty in getting away with is psychiatric heresy. Because psychiatry is taken seriously, and indeed, I would like to draw a parallel between today and the Middle Ages in the respect of this whole question.

When we go back to the days of the Spanish Inquisition, we must remember that the professor of theology at the University of Seville has the same kind of social prestige and intellectual standing that today would be enjoyed by the professor of pathology at Stanford Medical School. And you must bear in mind that this theologian, like the professor of pathology today, is a man of good will. Intensely interested in human welfare. He didn't merely opine; that professor of theology KNEW that anybody who had heretical religious views would suffer everlasting agony of the most appalling kind. And some of you should read the imaginative descriptions of the sufferings of Hell, written not only in the Middle Ages, but in quite recent times by men of intense intellectual acumen. And therefore out of real merciful motivation, the Inquisitors thought that it was the best thing they could do to torture heresy out of those who held it. Worse still, heresy was infectious, and would contaminate other people and put them in this immortal danger. And so with the best motivations imaginable, they used the thumbscrew, the rack, the iron maiden, the leaded cat-of-nine-tails, and finally the stake to get these people to come to their senses, because nothing else seemed to be available.

Today, serious heresy, and rather peculiarly in the United States, is a deviant state of consciousness. Not so much deviant opinions as having a kind of experience which is different from 'regular' experience. And as Ronald Lang, who is going to participate in this series, has so well pointed out, we are taught what experiences are permissible in the same way we are taught what gestures, what manners, what behavior is permissible and socially acceptable. And therefore, if a person has so-called 'strange' experiences, and endeavors to communicate these experiences--because naturally one talks about what one feels--and endeavors to communicate these experiences to other people, he is looked at in a very odd way and asked 'are you feeling all right?' Because people feel distinctly uncomfortable when they realize they are in the presence of someone who is experiencing the world in a rather different way from themselves. They call in question as to whether this person is indeed human.

They look like a human being, but because the state of experience is so different, you wonder whether they really are. And you get the kind of--the same kind of queasy feeling inside as you would get if, for the sake of example, you were to encounter a very beautiful girl, very formally dressed, and you were introduced, and in order to shake hands, she removed her glove, and you found in your hand the claw of a large bird. That would be spooky, wouldn't it?

Or let's suppose that you were looking at a rose. And you looked down in the middle where the petals are closed, and you suddenly saw them open like lips, and the rose addressed you and said 'good morning.' You would feel something uncanny was going on. And in rather the same way, in an every day kind of circumstance, when you are sitting in a bar drinking, and you find you have a drunk next to you. And he tells you, 'undistinguishable drunken ranting' and you sort of move your stool a little ways away from this man, because he's become in some way what we mean by nonhuman. Now, we understand the drunk; we know what's the matter with him, and it'll wear off. But when quite unaccountably, a person gives representation that he's suddenly got the feeling that he's living in backwards time, or that everybody seems to be separated from him by a huge sheet of glass. Or that he's suddenly seeing everything in unbelievably detailed moving colors. We say, 'well that's not normal. Therefore there must be something wrong with you.' And the fact that we have such an enormous percentage of the population of this country in mental institutions is a thing we may have to look at from a very different point of view, not that there may be a high incidence of mental sickness, but that there may be a high incidence of intolerance of variations of consciousness.

Now in Arabic countries, where the Islamic religion prevails, a person whom we would define as mentally deranged is regarded with a certain respect. The village idiot is looked upon with reverence because it is said his soul is not with his body, it is with Allah. And because his soul is with Allah, you must respect this body and care for it, not as something that is to be sort of swept away and put out of sight, but as something of a reminder that a man can still be living on Earth while his soul is in Heaven. Very different point of view. Also in India, there is a certain difference in attitude to people who would be called nuts, because there is a poem--an ancient poem of the Hindus-- which says 'sometimes naked, sometimes mad, now's a scholar, now's a fool, thus they appear on Earth as free men.'

But you see, we in our attitude to this sort of behavior, which is essentially in its first inception harmless, these people are talking what we regard to be nonsense. And to be experienced in nonsense. We feel threatened by that, because we are not secure in ourselves. A very secure person can adapt himself with amazing speed to different kinds of communication. In foreign countries, for example, where you don't speak the language of the people you are staying with, if you don't feel ashamed of this, you can set up an enormous degree of communication with other people through gesture and even something most surprising, people can communicate with each other by simply talking. You can get a lot across to people by talking intelligent nonsense, by, as it were, imitating a foreign language; speaking like it sounds. You can communicate feelings, emotions, like and dislike of this, that and the other; very simply. But if you are rigid and are not willing to do this type of playing, then you feel threatened by anybody who communicates with you in a funny way. And so this rigidity sets up a kind of vicious circle. The minute, in other words,

someone makes an unusual communication to you about an unusual state of consciousness, and you back off, the individual wonders 'is there something wrong with me? I don't seem to be understood by anyone.' Or he may wonder 'what's going on? Has everybody else suddenly gone crazy?' And then if he feels that he gets frightened, and to the degree that he gets more frightened, he gets more defensive, and eventually land up with being catatonic, which is a person who simply doesn't move. And so then what we do is we whiffle him off to an institution, where he is captured by the inquisitors. This is a very special priesthood. And they have all the special marks that priesthoods have always had. They have a special vestment. Like the Catholic priest at mass wears a \*, the mental doctor, like every physician, wears a long white coat, and may carry something that corresponds, shall we say, so a stole, which is a stethoscope around his neck. He will then, under his authority, which is often in total defiance of every conceivable civil liberty, will incarcerate this incomprehensible person, and as Lang has pointed out, he undergoes a ritual of dehumanization. And he's put away. And because the hospitals are so crowded with people of this kind, he's going to get very little attention. And it's very difficult to know, when you get attention, how to work with it.

You get into this Kafka-esque situation which you get, say, in the state of California, if you are sent to such an institute as Vacaville prison, which is as you drive on the highway from San Francisco to Sacramento, you will encounter Vacaville about halfway between. You will see a great sign which will say 'California State Medical Facility.' The state of California is famous for circumlocution. When you go underneath a low bridge, instead of saying 'Low Bridge,' it says 'Impaired Vertical Clearance.' Or when you're going to cross a toll bridge, instead of saying, plainly, 'Toll Bridge,' it says 'Entering Vehicular Crossing.' And when it should be saying, plainly, 'Prison,' it says either 'California State Medical Facility,' or 'California State Correctional Facility,' as it does as Soledad. Now Vacaville is a place where people get sent on what they call a one- to ten-year sentence. And there is a supervising psychiatric medical sort of social service staff there, who examine the inmates once in a while because they have such a large number. It's a maximum security prison, much more ringed around with defences than even San Quentin. I went there to lecture to the inmates some time ago. They wanted someone to talk to them about meditation and yoga, and one of the inmates took me aside--a very clean-cut all-American boy. And he had been put in there probably for smoking pot; I'm not absolutely sure in my memory what the offense was. He said 'You know, I am very puzzled about this place. I really want to go straight and get out and get a job and live like an ordinary person.' He said 'I think they don't know how to go about it. I've just been refused release; I went up before the committee; I talked to them. But I don't know what the rules of the game are. And incidentally, the members of the committee don't either.'

So we have these situation, you see, of confusion. So that when a person goes into a mental hospital and feels first of all perhaps that he should try to sort himself out and talk reasonably with the physician. There is introduced into the communications system between them a fundamental element of fear and mistrust. Because I could talk to any individual if I were malicious and interpret every sane remark you make as something deeply sinister; that would simply exhibit my own paranoia. And the psychiatrist can very easily get paranoid, because the system he is asked to represent, officially is paranoid. I talked with a

psychiatrist in England just a few weeks ago. One of the most charming women I've come across, an older woman, very intelligent, quite beautiful, very reasonable. And she was discussing with me the problem of the LSD psychosis. I asked her what sort of treatments they were using, and all sorts of questions about that, and she appeared at first to be a little on the defensive about it. We got onto the subject of the experience of what is officially called 'depersonalization,' where you feel that you and your experience--your sensory experience--that is to say all that you do experience: the people, the things, the animals, the buildings around you--that it's all one. I said 'do you call this a hallucination? After all,' I said, 'it fits the facts of science, of biophysics, of ecology, of biology, and much better than our ordinary normal experience fits it.' She said 'that's not my problem.' She said 'that may be true, but I am employed by a society which feels that it ought to maintain a certain average kind of normal experience, and my job is to restore people to what society considers normal consciousness. I have no alternative but to leave it at that.'

So, then. When someone is introduced into this situation, and it's very difficult to get attention, you feel terrified. The mental hospital, often in its very architecture, suggests some of the great visions of madness, of-- You know that feeling of-- The corridors of the mind. If you got lost in a maze and you couldn't get back. You're not quite sure who you are, or whether your father and mother are your real father and mother, or whether in the next ten minutes you're still going to remember how to speak English. You feel very lost. And the mental hospital in its architecture and everything represents that situation. Endless corridors, all the same. Which one are you in? Where are you? Will you ever get out? And it goes on monotonously, day after day after day after day after day. And someone who talks to you occasionally doesn't have a straight look in his eye. He doesn't see you as quite human. He looks at you as if you're weird. What are you to do? The best thing to do is get violent, if you really want to get out. Well then they say that's proof that you're crazy. And then as you get more violent, they put you off by yourself, and the only alternative you have, the only way of expressing yourself is to throw shit at the walls. Then they say, 'well, that's conclusive. The person isn't human.'

Well, the question has been raised a great deal in the last few days on the television, as to whether this is a sick society. And I have listened to a perfectly beautiful psychoanalyst with a thick German accent. Oh, marvelous things! 'Eet ees quite obvious dat society is quite hopeless, you zee.' And I have listened to four red-blooded Americans saying 'most people in this society are good people, and it's a GOOD society, but we have a very sick minority.'

Now, what I want to do in--certainly this first part of the seminar--is to call in question, very fundamentally, all of our basic ideas about what is sickness, what is health, what is sanity, what is insanity. Because I think we have to begin from this position of humility; that we really don't know. It's reported that shortly before he died, Robert Oppenheimer, looking at the picture of technology, especially nuclear technology, said 'I'm afraid it's perfectly obvious that the world is going to hell.' It's going to destroy itself, it's on collision course. The only way in which it might not go to hell is that we do not try to prevent it from doing so. Think that one over. Because it can well be argued that the major troublemakers in the world today are those people with good intentions. Like the professor of theology, University of Seville, professor of psychiatry at wherever you will. The idea that we know who is sick, who is wrong. Now, we are living in a political situation right now where a

most fantastic thing is occurring. Everybody knows what they're against; nobody knows what they're for. Because nobody is thinking in terms anymore of what would be a great style of life. The reason we have poverty is that we have no imagination. There's no earthly reason; there's no physical, technical reason for there being any poverty at all anywhere. But you see, there are a great many people accumulating what they think is vast wealth, but it's only money. They don't know how to use it, they don't know how to enjoy it, because they have no imagination.

I'm announcing not the date, but the intention of conducting a seminar for extremely rich people entitled 'Are You Rich and Miserable?' because you very probably are. Some aren't, but most are. Now the thing is that we are living in this situation where everybody knows what they're against, even if they say 'I'm against the war in Vietnam. I am against discrimination against colored people, or against any different race than the discolored race,' and so on. Yeah, so what? But it's not enough to feel like that; that's nothing. You must have some completely concrete vision of what you would like, and therefore I'm making a serious proposition that everybody who goes into college should as an entrance examination have the task of writing an essay on his idea of heaven, in which he is asked to be absolutely specific. He is not allowed, for example, to say 'I would like to have a very beautiful girl to live with.' What do you mean by a beautiful girl? Exactly how, and in what way? Specifically. You know, down to the last wiggle of the hips, and down to every kind of expression of character and socialbility and her interests and all. Be specific! And about everything like that. 'I would like a beautiful house to live in.' Just what exactly do you mean by a beautiful house? Well you've suddenly got to study architecture. You see, and finally, this preliminary essay on 'My Idea of Heaven' turns into his doctoral dissertation. So in a situation where we all know what we're against, and we don't know what we're for, then we know WHO we're against. We're defining all sorts of people as nonhuman. We say they're totally irrational. They're totally stupid. People will say, 'oh, those niggers, they're completely uneducated, they'll never learn a thing, there's nothing you can do about it, they're hopeless, get rid of them.' The Birchers are saying the same sort of thing. Other people, the liberals are saying the same thing about the Birchers. 'They're stupid, get rid of them.' The only result, then, the only thing anybody can think of in this sort of situation is 'get your gun.' And this sets up a vicious circle, because everybody else gets his gun. And the point from which we have to begin, then, is that we don't know who is healthy and who is sick. Who is right and who is wrong. And furthermore, we have to start, I think, from the assumption that because we don't know, there isn't anything we can do about it.

There's a Turkish proverb that I like to quote: 'He who sleeps on the floor cannot fall out of bed.' Therefore, we should make it a beginning--a basic assumption about life that even supposing you could improve society, and you could improve yourself, you were never sure that the direction you moved it in would be an improvement.

A Chinese story, kind of a Taoistic story about a farmer. One day, his horse ran away, and all the neighbors gathered in the evening and said 'that's too bad.' He said 'maybe.' Next day, the horse came back and brought with it seven wild horses. 'Wow!' they said, 'Aren't you lucky!' He said 'maybe.' He next day, his son grappled with one of these wild horses and tried to break it in, and he got thrown and broke his leg. And all the neighbors said 'oh, that's too bad that your son broke his leg.' He said, 'maybe.' The next day, the conscription officers

came around, gathering young men for the army, and they rejected his son because he had a broken leg. And the visitors all came around and said 'Isn't that great! Your son got out.' He said, 'maybe.'

You see, you never really know in which direction progress lies. And this is today a fantastic problem for geneticists. They genetecists, you know, because they think they are within some degree of controlling the DNA and RNA code, believe that it is really possible perhaps to breed the kind of human beings that we ought to have. And they say 'hooray!' But they think one moment and they think 'ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, but what kind of human being?' So they're very worried. And just a little while ago, a national committee of graduate students and geneticists had a meeting at the University of California and the asked a group of psychologists, theologans and philosophers to come and reason with them about this and give them some insight. And I was included. That means that they are REALLY desperate. So I said 'I'll tell you what, the only thing you can do is to be quite sure that you keep a vast variety of different kinds of human beings, because you never know what's going to happen next. And therefore we need an enormous, shall I say, varied battery of different kinds of human intelligence and resources and abilities. So that there will always be some kind of person available for any emergency that might turn up. So you see, there's a total fallacy in the idea of preaching to people. This is why I abandoned the ministries, I've often said, not because the church didn't practice what it preached, but because it preached. Because you cannot tell people what sort of pattern of life they ought to have, because if they followed your advice, you might have a breed of monsters. Look at it from the point of view that the human race is a breed of monsters.

I was thinking about it this afternoon, driving down from Monterey to here, and looking at the freeways, and all these little cars going along them, and I was wondering if I considered that the planet was a physical body like my own, whether I might not feel that this was some sort of an invasion of weird bacteria that were eating me up. Whether it may be that the birds and the bees and the flowers--animals in general--were a kind of healthy bacteria. You know, bees and birds sort of wander about, generally mix in with the forest and the fields and carry on a rather disorganized but very interesting pattern of life, whereas human beings cut straight lines across everything. Railways. They cover themselves with junk. A bird may have a little nest, but it doesn't have to surround itself with automobiles and books and buildings and phonograph records and universities and clutter up the whole landscape with a lot of bric- a-brac. Human beings pride themselves on this. 'You see, this is culture!' This is a great achievement. Build a building, you know? It's all you can get money for. You can't get money for professors, but you can get them for new buildings. So we cover the Earth with clutter. And so the Earth might feel as if we might feel if suddenly we got a disease which instead of leaving us soft-skinned, covered us with crystalline scabs, and this would be proliferating all over the place--a pox! Are we a pox on the planet? Don't be too sure that we're not. Consider simply this:

There is a good argument--keep in mind I'm saying these things to provoke you, to make you a little insane by being in doubt of all the assumptions which you think are firmly true. It is quite possible, you see, that the whole enterprise of man to control events on the Earth by his conscious intelligence, by his language, by his mathematics, and by his science is a disaster. We say look at his successes, look how much disease we have cured. Look how

much hunger has been abolished. Look how we have raised the standard of living. Yeah. But in how long a time?

Well, even if we say this started with the dawn of known history, it's a tiny little fragment of time, as compared with the time in which the human species has existed. And if it's the Industrial Revolution, it narrows down to the teenieest, weenieest little bit of time. How do we know this is progress? How do we know that this is a success? It may be a disaster of unimaginable proportions. It may be. But the truth is, we don't know. Of course, it could be possible, that every star in the heavens was once a planet, and that planet developed intelligent life, which in due course discovered the secrets of atomic energy, blew itself up into a chain reaction, and as it exploded throughout various masses which began in due course to spin around it, became planets, and after a while developed intelligent life. After millions of years, as the central star started to cool off, they blew themselves up in turn, and that's the way the thing goes on. That's of course the theory of the Hindus. Not literally, but they do have the theory, you see, that life, every manifestation of the universe, begins in a glorious way, and then it deteriorates. But then everything does. Isn't everything always falling apart and getting older and fading out? Why shouldn't various species, why shouldn't various planets, why shouldn't various universes be going through the same course?

You see, that's a totally upside-down view in respect to our common sense. We think everything ought to be growing and improving and getting better and better and better and better and better and better. Look at it the other way around, it might be quite different. Then there's another thought. We know that the truth, the way things are is an interaction, or better, transaction between the physical world and our sense organs, and that therefore, what we know as existence is a relationship. It is the way certain what we will call for the moment electrical vibrations make impression upon sense organs of a certain structure. Now that's a limited way of talking about it, but it will do for the moment. Therefore, according to the structure of the sense organs, the vibrations will appear of be manifested in different ways. In other words, I can move my finger like this, and if it happens to pluck the string of a violin, it will go 'plunk!' In which case my finger and its motion will be manifested as 'plunk!' But if it should so happen that I should strike the string of a bass fiddle, it will go, 'bunggggg' and so the finger will be 'bunggggg' But if the same motion should strike the skin of a drum, 'thunk,' so the finger will be 'thunk,' now what is that motion truly? It's whatever it interacts with. If it goes across somebody else's skin, it'll be something I can't make a noise about. It'd be a feeling. If it does it in front of an eye, it will be a motion.

So depending on the structure of shall we say for the moment the receptor organs, so will the reality be. Now behind the receptor organs--the senses are not at all simple--behind the senses they are inseparable from an extraordinarily complex neurological structure. And not only that, but a system of cultural standards as to what events are to be noticed and what events are to be ignored. What is important for a certain reason such as survival, and what is unimportant, and therefore we further modify the selectivity of the sense organs and of the nervous system as a whole with a selective system of what is culturally accepted as real or unreal, important or unimportant.

So we end up you see, with the possibility that so complex a selective system may have a great many variations, and that people that we call crazy have a different system of

evaluation. They may have a difference of neural structure, as would obviously be the case if there were lesions caused by syphilis, or by brain tumors. But what about something not quite at that level, but at the level of the selectivities they imply which would correspond to what I call social conditioning. Now we know the proverb that genius is to madness 'cross the line. And how do we know whether a certain modification in the structure of the whole sensory system is a sickness or whether it is a growing edge--some kind of improvement in the human being. Well we have certain very, very rough standards which we apply to this, but we can never be quite sure because what we call sanity is mob rule. Sanity is simply the vote of organisms that recognize themselves to be humans and they get together and say 'Well, the way we see it is the way it is.' And you will remember in Kipling's story in the 'Jungle Book' called 'Cause Hunting' how the monkeys, the bandiloot are laughed at because every once in a while they get together in a meeting and shout 'We all say so, so it must be true!'

But herein you see lie the deepest political problems. How is the majority to tolerate, to absorb, to evaluate a minority? It's an academic problem. We have standards as to who are sound scholars, reliable scientists--we give them a PhD. And they all get together and uphold the standards. But then they suddenly realize that they're getting a little narrow and that things aren't going on, and suddenly somebody says one day 'Old so-and-so, who we always thought was quite mad and very, very unorthodox has suddenly come up with an idea that we've all got to think about.' So one would say that every university faculty has to include in its membership at least five percent screwballs. Every culture has to tolerate within its domain a lot of weird people. Now there's no possibility that everybody in the United States is going to be a hippie. But the fact that a large number of young people are hippies should be a matter of congratulations, even if you don't want to live that way yourself. Not to mention the various racial variations that we have among us: negroes, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, and so forth. All this is exceedingly important, because as I said to the geneticists, this preserves variety. And a culture which is insecure in itself--I'm getting back to a sort of starting point--cannot tolerate this.

Now in England as I remember it, they were much more secure. When I was a boy, 15 years old, in a very orthodox Church of England school, I announced that I was a Buddhist. Nobody turned a hair. Here, if somebody announces that he's something strange, they have to go before the principal, and there's a big problem, and the FBI is brought in, and this, that, and the other. But they said 'Jolly wot, the man's a buhddist!' And positively encouraged me in my deviant interest, and gave me the first prize in the divinity class. Now exactly the same kind of relaxed attitude is necessary here.

Let's ask a few questions that don't need answers. Is the American family such a drag that a few kids living in free-love communes are a fundamental threat to it and will pervert all our nice boys and girls to live that way? Are American universities so boring that a few students who drop out and form their own universities are a threat to the total system and will pervert all the other nice children in there? Are a few kids going around in elegant beards and long hair going to turn all our boys into weirdos?

Say, I had a funny experience. When I was in England I attended services at Westminster Abbey. I took my wife there because I really wanted to her to see this thing, because it's the

heart and soul of British establishment. The dean of Westminster is like the Dali Lama almost. They had this very elegant Victorian service--beautiful vestments, choir and everything--and as they were coming out in procession, the choir came first, which were little boys with proper haircuts and surplices. And red caps on, there were a number of older boys wearing surplices--the special kind of surplice that is worn by its color of a British public school. You know, the public schools are not public schools, they're very private schools, very exclusive schools, and the school of Westminster is one of the top, like Eaton or Harrow. Suddenly, these boys in surplices turn up, with these enormous Beatles haircuts whishing all over the place. I couldn't believe my eyes, because I used to be a King's Scholar, and in our day, we were very proper and all wore mortarboards over short hair. And then behind these surpliced boys, there were the commoners of the school, who were not King's Scholars and therefore didn't wear surplices, but wore striped black pants, black coats, wing collars and black ties. And we always used to walk in procession as we came out, like this, but here were these boys with a similar hairdo coming out. .apparent visual joke here that I guess you'd have to be there to get, but very funny, it would seem. My god, what's going on? This is Westminster Abbey! But the dean of Westminster doesn't turn a hair, he takes it all in stride. He's perfectly secure. He knows he is who he is. He knows it's ordained by Jesus Christ and everything else and it's all right, and if you want to come in and do something different, it's all right.

And that is the attitude we have to have in regard to everything deviant, psychotic, and weird. Because we are not sure what's right, who's sane, which end is up. In a relativistic universe, you don't cling to anything, you learn to swim. And you know what swimming is. It's a kind of relaxed attitude to the water, in which you don't keep yourself afloat by holding the water, but by a certain giving to it, and it's just the same with relationships to people all around.

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## ALAN WATTS: THE VALUE OF PSYCHOTIC EXPERIENCE, PART 2

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Zen has attracted attention over the years, since 1927, when Dr. Daisetz Suzuki first published his essays in Zen Buddhism, and he had a very odd fascination with Westerners. To begin with, very many intelligent Western people were becoming--had already become, dissatisfied with the standard brands of their own religions, and this dissatisfaction had of course begun to take place quite seriously towards the close of the 19th century, and at that time, we began to be exposed to Oriental philosophy or religion, whatever you want to call it, because the great scholars like Maxmilla, Riese Davids and so on were translating the texts of Buddhism and Hinduism. And already in 1848, the Jesuit had translated the Tao Te Ching, the Taoist texts from China into French, and translations into English then became available.

What happened was rather curious, because we were receiving Oriental tradition on a far higher level of sophistication than we were receiving the Christian or the Jewish traditions. The average person was exposed to an extremely low level of Christianity, and therefore immediately compared this to the highest level of Hinduism and Buddhism, much to the detriment of the former, because you could no go into your parish church, even if you lived in a very good neighborhood, even in a university neighborhood and find Meister Eckhart for sale on the entrance table. Nor even would you find some Thomas Aquinas. You found

wretched little tracts. And so the comparison was overwhelming. It wasn't really fair for the Christian tradition, but that's what happened. Then something else happened, which was that in the year 1875, a strange Russian woman by the name of H.P. Blavatsky• founded the Theosophical Society, whose doctrines and literature were a fantastic hodgepodge of the Western occult tradition, a great deal of Hindu and Buddhist lore, a smattering of Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism, but it all was very romantic, and presuppose that the adepts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and so forth were very high order initiates. Supermen. The masters. And they had their secret lodges in the vastness of the Himalayas, and even such places as the Andes, and they were rather inaccessible, because they were in possession of the most dangerous secrets of occult power. But they every now and then felt safe to send an emissary out into the world to teach the ancient doctrine of liberation to mankind.

And so the West, through this, got an extremely glamorous impression of what Oriental wisdom might be. And I remember the media in which I found myself involved in England when Dr. Suzuki first came around was essentially theosophical in its orientation. They expected Dr Suzuki to be a master in that sense, in that theosophical sense, or if not quite that, then at least in touch with those who were. And the whole idea of the Zen master, the way the whole word 'master' got attached to a teacher of Zen carried with it this theosophical flavor, and also a certain flavor which the Theosophical Society picked up from India where the great guru is somebody enormously revered. People would travel for hundreds of miles just to look at him, to have what is called Tao-Shan•, or 'view' of someone like Shri Arabindo• or Shri Ramana Maharshi or the current Maharshi, or it would be Shri Rama Krishna or Amandani, who's a lady guru, and there's always the feeling that these people have tremendous powers. And so this is what was expected by many people from Zen masters. But the interesting thing about Zen masters is they're not like that. They're very human. And they wouldn't deign to perform a miracle. I got to know about Zen masters through my first wife, because when she was an adolescent about 14 years old, she went to Japan, and they lived close to the great monastery of Nonzengi where the master in charge was a very brilliant master by the name of Nonshinkan•. He was an old man, and he was-- The man who is appointed to be the roshi or the teacher of Nonzengi of Kyoto was always considered to be just about tops of the whole bunch. We've had the present master, Shibayama Roshi visiting the United States recently. And he used to sit around with her and he'd get a catalog of all the famous sumo wrestlers, who were enormously fat. They have to eat, eat, eat, eat, eat, eat rice, because the whole art depends on their weight. But they're very handsome. And he used to thumb them through sitting next to this little girl and pick out husbands for her. And then he would have nose-picking contests with her. Y'know, they weren't exactly real, but they'd make sort of like picking their noses and flicking the snots at each other.

So you mustn't expect the Zen master to be like the Pope. They can come on very dignified when necessary, but there's always something about them which is fundamentally lacking in seriousness. Even though they may be well-endowed with sincerity. They're two quite different qualities. They are extraordinarily interesting people, as are their students, in the context of Japanese culture. Japanese culture is terribly uptight, because the Japanese are very emotional people, underneath. Tremendously passionate. But they have to hold that in,

because they live in a crowded country, and space is the most valuable thing in Japan, especially living space, because 80% of the territory is uninhabitable. It's forested mountains, and you can't grow anything there, you can't make much of a city. So they're all crowded into 20% of the country. And so this feeling of being pressed in by other people is-- They try to handle it by exquisite politeness, and by orderly behavior by vary strong convention. But this makes the average Japanese man and woman kind of nervous. When a Japanese giggles, it's a sign not of being amused, but of being embarrassed. And you'll find all sorts of funny attitudes, such as people putting their hands over their mouths when they're eating, or to conceal a giggle.

And they're tremendously hung up on social indebtedness, whether it's a debt to the emperor, or whether it's a debt to your fathers and mothers, or whether it's a debt to someone in the family, or whether it's a debt to friends whom you visited and they entertained you. Well, you always take gifts with you when you go, but then that still embarrasses your friends to whom you take the gifts, because they have to consider the next time they go to visit you, they've got to take gifts of the same value. And you wouldn't believe what goes on.

So actually, what Zen is in Japan is a release from Japanese culture. It is gettign rid of the hang-ups, but doing it in such a way as not to embarrass the rest of society. So the Zen monks come on as if they're pretty stiff; when they walk out in the street, they almost look like soldiers. When they walk, they stride, they don't shuffle, like other Japanese do. They don't giggle, ever. They have no need to. Because the process of their discipline has liberated them from the social conventions. Only they are very tactful and don't rush out like, you know, a bunch of hippies or something and say 'Look, we're liberated!' They pretend they're the very pillars of society.

So they follow a tradition which is very ancient, which is that in every society, there is an inner group who doesn't believe in the fairy stories they've been told. He sees through. To whom everything becomes completely transparent. You see what games people are playing. And you don't despise them for that. You see, they're involved in that because of their whole conditioning. But you see through all those games. The game--the me game--that everybody is playing is of course the survival game. And we think-- We've got our minds rigged about this in such a way that we live in constant dread of sickness or of death or of loss of property or status. Well, so what? Supposing you do. Everybody's going to die someday. It's a little harder to take when you're 20 than when you're 50, but if you are entirely hung up on the idea that YOU are this particular expression of the universe and that only, you haven't been properly educated. If you were awake, you would understand that you were the whole universe, pretending, projecting itself at a point called here and now, in the form of the human organism. And you would understand that very clearly, not just as an idea, but as an actual vivid sensation, just the same way you know you're sitting in this room. And so the object of Zen, as of other ways of liberation--Taoism, Hinduism; you'll find it even in Christianity in the Eastern Orthodox Church; Islam--the object of these ways of liberation is to bring you to a vivid, perfectly clear, I would say even sensuous realization of your true identity as a temporary coming on and going off, coming on and going off, or vibration as waves, of what there is, and always is, of the famous E which equals MC squared. And you are that. You will be that, and always will be that--accept that. This whatever it is-- which,

then no which, then which--it doesn't operate in time. Time is a more or less human illusion. We will discover this to be so in our experiments. You will discover that there is only now, and there never was anything but now and never will be anything but now, and now is eternity.

Now Zen is a little bit unlike the rest of Hinduism and Buddhism in that it's summed up in these four principles: It's a special transmission of the Buddhist enlightenment outside the scriptures. It does not depend on words or letters. It points directly to your own mind-heart and attains therefore Buddhahood directly. Buddhahood means the state of being awakened to the real nature of things. But you see, what IS the real nature of things? It obviously cannot be described. Just as if I were to ask what is the true position of the stars in the big dipper. Well, it depends from where you're looking. From one point in space, they would be completely different in position from another. So there is no true position of those stars. So in the same way, you cannot therefore describe their true position or their true nature. And yet on the other hand, when you look at them, and really don't try to figure it out, you see them as they are, and they are as they are from every point of view, wherever you look at them.

So there is no way of describing or putting your finger on what the Buddhists call reality or in Sanskrit, tathata, which means 'suchness' or 'thatness,' or sunyata, which means 'voidness,' in the sense that all conceptions of the world when absolutised are void. It doesn't mean that the world is, in our Western sense, nothing. It means that it's no thing. And a thing--as I think I explained last night--is a unit of thought. A think. So reality isn't a think. We cannot say what it is, but we can experience it. And that is of course the project of Zen.

Now, it does it by direct pointing. And this is what exciting people about Dr Suzuki's work when he first let people know about Zen in the Western world. It seemed to consist of an enormous assemblage of weird anecdotes. That these people instead of explaining had kind of a joke system, or kind of a riddle system. The basic secret of the Buddha system is simply this, and it's explained by a great Chinese Zen master, whose name was Hui-neng, who died in the year 713 AD. And he explained it in his sutra. He said, 'If anybody asks you about secular matters, answer them in terms of metaphysical matters. But if they ask you about things physical, answer them in terms of things worldly.' So if you ask a Zen master what is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, he answers immediately, 'Have you had breakfast?' 'Yes.' 'If so, go and wash your bowl.' Or such a thing as 'Since I came to you master, you have never given me any instruction.' 'How can you say that I've never given you any instruction? When you brought me tea, didn't I drink it? When you brought me rice, didn't I eat it? When you saluted me, didn't I return the salutation? How can you say that I haven't instructed you?' And the student said, 'Master, I don't understand.' And he said, 'If you want to understand, see into it directly, but when you begin to think about it, it is altogether missed.'

They have also in Zen monasteries a funny thing. It's a chin rest. If you spend a long time meditating, it's sometimes convenient to have something to rest your chin on, and it's called a Zen-bon. And so once a student asked the teacher, 'Why did Bodhidharma--' who is supposed to have brought Zen, you know from India to China '--why did Bodhidharma come to China?' And the master said 'Give me that Zen-bon.' And the student passed it to him and

the master hit him with it.

A contrary kind of story. The master and one of his students were working, I think pruning trees. And suddenly the student said to the master, 'Will you let me have the knife?' And he handed it to him blade-first. He said 'Please let me have the other end.' And the master said 'What would you do with the other end?'

There was a group walking through the forest, and suddenly the master picked up a branch and handed it to one of his disciples and said 'Tell me, what is it?' Y'know, the master was still holding it. He said 'Tell me, what is it?' The disciple hesitated, and the master hit him with it. He passed it to another desciple. 'What is it?' The disciple said 'Let me have it so I can tell you.' So the master threw the branch at this other disciple, and he caught it and hit the master.

I was once talking with a Zen master, and in an idle sort of way we were discussing these stories, and he said, 'You know, I've often wondered, when water goes down a drain, does it go clockwise or anticlockwise?' 'Well, I said, it might do either.' He said 'NO! It goes this way!' -apparently something visual here,. So then he said 'Which came first, egg or hen?' So I said, -clucks like hen,. He said 'Yes, that's right.'

Now all these Zen jokes are much simpler in their meaning than you would ever imagine. They are so devestatingly simple that you don't see them. Everybody looks for something complicated. When I was once visited by a Chinese Zen man, I had my little daughter with me, and he said to her, 'You know, once upon a time, there was a man who kept a very small goose in a bottle. A gosling. And it began to grow larger and larger until he couldn't get it out of the bottle. Now, he didn't want to break the bottle, and he didn't want to hurt the goose, so what should he do?' And she said immediately, 'Just break the bottle.' He turned to me and he said 'You see, they always get it when they're under seven.'

So there's that side of Zen, and that side of Zen we would call, essentially, in technical language, sanzen. That means, really, to study Zen in the form of an interchange with the teacher. Sanzen in the monasteries these days is very formal. But these are all stories from Tan and Sung dynasty China, where the relationship of student and teacher was more informal than it has now become. The other side of Zen is za-zen, or the practice of meditation. And that involves-- You can actually practice za-zen in four ways, corresponding to what the Buddhists call the four dignitarries of man: walking, standing, sitting, and lying. Only sitting is the one most used. But you should not imagine that Zen mediation requires absolutely that it be done sitting. People get rather hung up on that, and I get annoyed with people who come back from Japan having studied Zen and brag about how long they sat and how much their legs hurt.

But za-zen is very fundamental to Zen, in one form or another. And it is the art of letting your mind become still. That doesn't mean that it becomes blank. That doesn't mean that you have no what we would call sensory input. It mean simply that you learn how to breath properly. That's very important. And that you stop talking to yourself. The interminable chatter inside your skull comes to rest. So what happens is this-- I should add that there are various schools of Zen, with different methods and different approaches, and my approach to it is again somewhat different from other peoples, but buddhas have always have this kind

of elasticity. But what normally happens is this:

You have some difficulty in being accepted by a teacher, because Buddhism is not on a missionary basis. They don't send out ads and invitations saying 'Come to our jolly church,' you know. They wouldn't dream of doing that. Because it's up to you to seek it out. They're never going to shove it down your throat. So it is difficult to get into a Zen school. It isn't really a monastery as we have monasteries, where the monks take life vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. It's more like a theological seminary, and the monk, or seminarist, as he might more accurately be called, stays there for a number of years, until he feels he's got the thing that he went for. The teacher, the master, is usually unmarried, but that doesn't prevent him from having girlfriends. They are not uptight about sex in Zen, as they are in other forms of Buddhism. They're very-- The whole atmosphere of the monastery is very fascinating. Everybody is sort of alive. They don't dither around. They're all working. But they're very open. In some kinds of Buddhism, they have conniptions if you try to photograph something. 'This is too sacred to be photographed,' sort of attitude. In Zen, they say 'Help yourself! Photograph! Anything! Go on, take picture!' So, completely open.

So then, they have these sesshins. You must distinguish between 'session,' English, and 'sesshin,' Japanese. 'Sesshin' means a long, long period of meditation practice, over say, a whole week. But especially early in the morning, and at certain times of day, they all meet and they sit cross-legged on their mats in meditation. In one set, they meditate on what is called a koan, and that means a 'case,' in the sense of a case in law establishing a precedent. And it's one of these stories. When the great master Joshu•, who lived in the Tung dynasty, was asked, 'Does a dog have buddha nature?' he replied 'mu,' which means no. Everybody knows that dogs have buddha nature. So why did the great master say 'mu'? That's a koan. Or Hakuin invented a koan as a proverb in Chinese: One hand cannot make a clap. So the koan is 'What is the sound of one hand?' Of course, it's differently said in Japanese than it is in English. But, you see, it sounds like a very, very complicated problem, and so these students take this problem back for meditation, and they-- First of all, the average person would start trying to arrive at an intellectual answer. And if he takes that back to the teacher, the teacher simply rejects it out of hand, time after time after time.

I had a friend who had this koan, and he was an American. And one day he was going to the teacher for sanzen, and he saw a bullfrog. They have many bullfrogs in Japan, about so big, sitting in the garden, and they're very tame. So he swooped up this bullfrog and dropped it in the sleeve of his kimono. And when he got to the master, he produced the bullfrog as the answer to the koan. The master shook his head and said 'Uh-uh, too intellectual.' So people get desperate about these things, and they go to all sorts of lengths to try and answer them, because they don't realize how simple the answer is. That's what's always overlooked. If you were to answer that koan in English, it gives it to you as it's stated. It says 'WHAT is the sound of one hand?' .Watts finds this very funny, but nobody else does, It's very difficult for people to become that simple. And you can become that simple only through meditation where you stop all the words and you see all the things perfectly directly. And so accomplished Zen people are very, very direct. Their life is completely simplified, because they know perfectly well--and if you look, and see yourself--that there is only this present moment. No past. No future.

So what's your problem? You know, you could ask this of anyone. Well, you could say 'I've got all sorts of problems and responsibilities' and so on. All right. Don't other people have some share in this? You see, we are always being spiritually conceited in thinking we have to take care of everybody else, and that can sometimes do people a peculiar disservice, because they get into the idea that everybody should take care of them. And so we go around ingratiating ourselves by making all sorts of promises about which we feel enthusiastic at the time, but the enthusiasm wears off and then we don't keep them and then people get annoyed. And we go about telling people how much we like them when we don't. And all sorts of things of that kind by not being direct, you see. This is the whole idea of Zen, is directness. By not being direct, we create a great deal of trouble. However, the primary concern of Zen is not so much with interpersonal relations, as it is with man's relation with nature. In view of life and death, where are you? They have an inscription that hangs up in Zen monasteries, which says 'Birth and death is a serious event. Time waits for no one.' Which is sort of equivalent to the Christian 'Work out your salvation with diligence.' Or with fear and trembling.

So it begins in a clarification of our relationship with existence. With being. And therefore it lies in a more, I would say, primary or kindergarden level than the encounter group, which is concerned with personal relationships. But I don't think you can set up harmonious personal relationships until you've got with yourself. Until you've got with the sky, the trees, and the rocks, and the water, and the fire. Then you're fundamental. You're really alive. From that position, you can relate much better to other people, because you don't come on as a kind of 'poor little me, who's in this universe on probation and doesn't really belong' attitude. And most of us do that, terribly apologetic for our existence. Just because we're apologetic, some people are insufferably proud, because they feel they have to compensate for this inferior status in the universe by overdoing it with boastfulness and with aggression towards others. But if you know that-- Well, when Dogen came back from China--he lived around 1200 AD, and studied Zen there and founded a great monastery--they asked him 'What did you learn in China?' He said, 'I learned that the eyes are horizontal, and the nose is perpendicular.'

Now in all these things, don't search for a deep symbolism. Some decrepit modern Chinese Zen will look for--will give you a symbolic understanding of all these sayings. But they're NOT symbolic; they're absolutely direct. So when somebody says, you see, that the fundamental principle of Buddhism is a cypress tree in the garden, you are not to understand this this is some pantheistic doctrine in which the cypress tree is a manifestation of the godhead. Let me illustrate the point further, because I can't illustrate it intellectually. It's a little bit of a complicated story, but I think you can follow it.

There is a sect of Buddhism in Japan called Jodo-shinshu .Sukhavati?,, which means the true teaching about the pure land. And they have a method of meditation in which they call upon the name of a transcendental buddha called Amida. So they say this formula, 'Namu Amida Butsu.' Namu means like 'hail,' only it means, in other cultures and other languages than ours, instead of saying 'hail,' they say 'name,' 'nama.' So 'Namu Amida Butsu' means 'Hail Amitabha buddha,' or 'Amida' is the Japanese. That formula is called 'Nambutsu,' or 'Having the buddha in mind.'

There was a priest of this sect that went to study with a Zen master, and had made good

progress, and the master told him to write a poem expressing his understanding. So he wrote the following poem:

When nambutsu is said, There is neither oneself nor Buddha; Na-mu- a-mi-da-bu-tsu-- Only the sound is heard.

And the Zen master scratched his head awhile, because he wasn't quite satisfied with it, so the student submitted another poem which did satisfy the master, and it went like this:

When the nambutsu is said, There is neither oneself nor Buddha; Na-ma-a-mi-da-bu-tsu, Na-ma-a-mi-da-bu-tsu.

The master was satisfied, but in my opinion it had one line too many.

So you see that the Zen practice involves using words to get beyond words, where we might use words simply for their sound. Let's suppose you say the word 'yes.' Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. You come to think after a while 'Isn't that a funny kind of noise to make?' And we are delivered from the hypnotic effect of words by this particular use of words. We learn they're only words after all, but we hypnotize people by using words. And children, for instance, have no antibodies against words, so they get absolutely frantic, you know. 'Jeannie called me a sissy!' So what? But children get absolutely desperate about it because we put this power of words upon them, these incantations. These are spells, you see. All magicians embroil people in spells and incantations, because they use words to beguile. And so then, we are from infancy told who we are, what is our identity, what our expectations should be, what we ought to get out of life, what class we belong to. And we believe the whole thing. And having believed it, we come to sense it, as we sense the hard wood of the corner of the table, and we think it's real, and it's a bunch of hogwash. It's an amusing game, if you know that that's all it is, and can be played with eloquence. But the more you know it's ONLY an illusion, the better you can play it.

So then. In this practice, it is very important, as I said last night, to bear it in mind that Zen study or Zen meditation--and this includes yoga and other forms of meditation--is not like any other form of exercise, in that it is NOT done for a purpose. You may ask me 'How can I possibly do something that is not being done for a purpose?' because you have a fixed idea, which is part of the hypnosis, that everything you do is done for a purpose. For what purpose do you have belly rumbles?

I remember Soki Antsuzaki•, who was a great Zen master, sitting in his gorgeous golden robes, with incense burning in front of him, and his scriptures open on the stand, and holding a sort of sceptor that Zen masters occasionally hold, and reading a passage from the sutra, then by comment saying, 'Fundamental principle of Buddhism is purposelessness. Most important to attain state of no purpose. When you drop fart, you don't say 'At 9:00, I drop fart.' It just happen.' And all this kind crypto-Christian audience, very embarrassed, stuffing handkerchiefs into their mouths.

In Chinese, their word for nature is 'tzu-jan,' in Japanese, 'shi-jen•,' at that means, 'what is so of itself. We would say 'spontaneity.' A tree has no intention to grow. Water has no intention to flow. The clouds have no intention to blow. And as the poem says,

When the wild geese fly over the lake, The water does not intend to reflect them, And the geese have no mind to cast their image.

Now, that worries us. First of all, we think that spontaneity is mere capricious action. There's nothing very capricious about the way a tree grows. It's a highly intelligent design. So is the bird. So are you. But a lot of people who don't quite understand Zen think that spontaneity is just doing anything, and the more it looks like anything, the more spontaneous it is. In other words, they have a preconception of spontaneity, that a person behaving spontaneously. Or would probably be vulgar, impolite, rude. It doesn't follow; that's merely a preconception of the nature of spontaneity. Spontaneity is the way you grow your hair, it's not the way you think you ought to grow your hair. It's the way it happens. So that's a really high order of intelligence.

What is happening, then, in the discipline of Zen is that we are trying to move into the place where we use that intelligence in everyday life--but you see, you can't get it on purpose. The purpose, the motivation always spoils it. So you would ask then, 'How do I get rid of purpose?' On purpose? That you ask that question simply shows how tied up you are in the thinking process. You cannot force that process to stop. You have to see it as nonsense. Babble. Interminable babble in your head. So one learns to listen to one's thoughts and let the mind think anything it wants to think, but don't take it seriously. And the idea of you doing this is also a babble in the head. And eventually--but without bothering about any eventually, because in this state, there is no future; you're not concerned about the future. Purpose is always concerned with the future.

Now what bugs Western people about this is they would say 'Are you trying to tell us that life has no meaning, no purpose?' Yes. What's so bad about that? What sort of meaning would you like it to have? Propose me a meaning for life. Anything you want. Well, when people try to think of what the meaning of life is, they say 'Well, I think that we're all part of a plan, and that working as if we were characters in a novel or a play, and we are all working towards a great fulfillment. One day, perhaps after we're dead, perhaps in the future life, there'll be a great gazoozie. There'll be a galuptious, glorious goodie at the end of the line, see? And that's what we're all for, see? To get in with that. And it will all be very, very important, because it won't be something trivial. It will be something extremely holy.' Well I say 'What's your idea of something very holy?' Well, nobody really knows. You know, they think about church, and medieval artists who used to represent heaven in the form of everybody sitting in choir stalls. And I must say hell looked much more fun. It was a kind of sado-masochistic orgy. But heaven looked insufferably dull. And when those little children sang hymns about those eternal sabbaths, it was a a very, depressing future, I can assure you.

But you see, when you follow through these ideas, what do you want? What is the goodie? What is progress all about? You realize that you just don't know. So the question is immediately posed for the meditator, but aren't you there already? I mean, isn't THIS what it's about?

# The World As Emptiness

## Alan Watts

by Alan Watts

(or, How the Dharma Bum Spent His Easter Vacation transcribing)

This particular weekend seminar is devoted to Buddhism, and it should be said first that there is a sense in which Buddhism is Hinduism, stripped for export. Last week, when I discussed Hinduism, I discussed many things to do with the organization of Hindu society, because Hinduism is not merely what we call a religion, it's a whole culture. It's a legal system, it's a social system, it's a system of etiquette, and it includes everything. It includes housing, it includes food, it includes art. Because the Hindus and many other ancient peoples do not make, as we do, a division between religion and everything else. Religion is not a department of life; it is something that enters into the whole of it. But you see, when a religion and a culture are inseparable, it's very difficult to export a culture, because it comes into conflict with the established traditions, manners, and customs of other people.

So the question arises, what are the essentials of Hinduism that could be exported? And when you answer that, approximately you'll get Buddhism. As I explained, the essential of Hinduism, the real, deep root, isn't any kind of doctrine, it isn't really any special kind of discipline, although of course disciplines are involved. The center of Hinduism is an experience called *\_maksha[?]*, liberation, in which, through the dissipation of the illusion that each man and each woman is a separate thing in a world consisting of nothing but a collection of separate things, you discover that you are, in a way, on one level an illusion, but on another level, you are what they call 'the self,' the one self, which is all that there is. The universe is the game of the self, which plays hide and seek forever and ever. When it plays 'hide,' it plays it so well, hides so cleverly, that it pretends to be all of us, and all things whatsoever, and we don't know it because it's playing 'hide.' But when it plays 'seek,' it enters onto a path of yoga, and through following this path it wakes up, and the scales fall from one's eyes.

Now, in just the same way, the center of Buddhism, the only really important thing about Buddhism is the experience which they call 'awakening.' Buddha is a title, and not a proper name. It comes from a Sanskrit root, 'bheudh,' and that sometimes means 'to know,' but better, 'waking.' And so you get from this root 'bodhih.' That is the state of being awakened. And so 'buddha,' 'the awakened one,' 'the awakened person.' And so there can of course in Buddhist ideas, be very many buddhas. The person called THE buddha is only one of myriads. Because they, like the Hindus, are quite sure that our world is only one among billions, and that buddhas come and go in all the worlds. But sometimes, you see, there comes into the world what you might call a 'big buddha.' A very important one. And such a one is said to have been Guatama, the son of a prince living in northern India, in a part of the world we now call Nepal, living shortly after 600 BC. All dates in Indian history are vague, and so I never try to get you to remember any precise date, like 564, which some people think it was, but I give you a vague date--just after 600 BC is probably right.

Most of you, I'm sure, know the story of his life. Is there anyone who doesn't, I mean roughly? Ok. So I won't bother too much with that. But the point is, that when, in India, a man was called a buddha, or THE buddha, this is a title of a very exalted nature. It is first of all necessary for a buddha to be human. He can't be any other kind of being, whether in the Hindu scale of beings he's above the human state or below it. He is superior to all gods, because according to Indian ideas, gods or angels--angels are probably a better name for them than gods--all those exalted beings are still in the wheel of becoming, still in the chains of karma--that is action that requires more action to complete it, and goes on requiring the need for more action. They're still, according to popular ideas, going 'round the wheel from life after life after life after life, because they still have the thirst for existence, or to put it in a Hindu way: in them, the self is still playing the game of not being itself.

But the buddha's doctrine, based on his own experience of awakening, which occurred after seven years of attempts to study with the various yogis of the time, all of whom used the method of extreme asceticism, fasting, doing all sort of exercises, lying on beds of nails, sleeping on broken rocks, any kind of thing to break down egocentricity, to become unselfish, to become detached, to exterminate desire for life. But buddha found that all that was futile; that was not The Way. And one day he broke his ascetic discipline and accepted a bowl of some kind of milk soup from a girl who was looking after cattle. And suddenly in this tremendous relaxation, he went and sat down under a tree, and the burden lifted. He saw, completely, that what he had been doing was on the wrong track. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. And no amount of effort will make a person who believes himself to be an ego be really unselfish. So long as you think, and feel, that you are a someone contained in your bag of skin, and that's all, there is no way whatsoever of your behaving unselfishly. Oh yes, you can imitate unselfishness. You can go through all sorts of highly refined forms of selfishness, but you're still tied to the wheel of becoming by the golden chains of your good deeds, as the obviously bad people are tied to it by the iron chains of their misbehaviors.

So, you know how people are when they get spiritually proud. They belong to some kind of a church group, or an occult group, and say 'Of course we're the ones who have the right teaching. We're the in-group, we're the elect, and everyone else outside.' It is really off the track. But then comes along someone who one-ups THEM, by saying 'Well, in our circles, we're very tolerant. We accept all religions and all ways as leading to The One.' But what they're doing is they're playing the game called 'We're More Tolerant Than You Are.' And in this way the egocentric being is always in his own trap.

So buddha saw that all his yoga exercises and ascetic disciplines had just been ways of trying to get himself out of the trap in order to save his own skin, in order to find peace for himself. And he realized that that is an impossible thing to do, because the motivation ruins the project. He found out, then, see, that there was no trap to get out of except himself. Trap and trapped are one, and when you understand that, there isn't any trap left. [Dharma Bum's note: this made me think of a bit from an Anglican hymn: 'We, by enemies distressed,/They in paradise at rest;/We the captives, they the freed,/We and they are one indeed.'] I'm going to explain that of course more carefully.

So, as a result of this experience, he formulated what is called the \_dharma\_, that is the

Sanskrit word for 'method.' You will get a certain confusion when you read books on Buddhism, because they switch between Sanskrit and Pali words. The earliest Buddhist scriptures that we know of are written the Pali language, and Pali is a softened form of Sanskrit. So that, for example, the doctrine of the buddha is called in Sanskrit the 'dharma,' we must in pronouncing Sanskrit be aware that an 'A' is almost pronounced as we pronounce 'U' in the word 'but.' So they don't say 'darmuh,' they say 'durmuuh.' And so also this double 'D' you say 'budduh' and so on. But in Pali, and in many books of Buddhism, you'll find the Buddhist doctrine described as the 'dhama.' And so the same way 'karma' in Sanskrit, in Pali becomes 'kama.' 'Buddha' remains the same. The dharma, then, is the method.

Now, the method of Buddhism, and this is absolutely important to remember, is dialectic. That is to say, it doesn't teach a doctrine. You cannot anywhere what Buddhism teaches, as you can find out what Christianity or Judaism or Islam teaches. Because all Buddhism is a discourse, and what most people suppose to be its teachings are only the opening stages of the dialog.

So the concern of the buddha as a young man--the problem he wanted to solve--was the problem of human suffering. And so he formulated his teaching in a very easy way to remember. All those Buddhist scriptures are full of what you might call mnemonic tricks, sort of numbering things in such a way that they're easy to remember. And so he summed up his teaching in what are called the Four Noble Truths. And the first one, because it was his main concern, was the truth about duhkha. Duhkha, 'suffering, pain, frustration, chronic dis-ease.' It is the opposite of sukha, which means 'sweet, pleasure, etc.'

So, insofar as the problem posed in Buddhism is dukkha, 'I don't want to suffer, and I want to find someone or something that can cure me of suffering.' That's the problem. Now if there's a person who solves the problem, a buddha, people come to him and say 'Master, how do we get out of this problem?' So what he does is to propose certain things to them. First of all, he points out that with dukkha go two other things. These are respectively called anitya and anatman. Anitya means--'nitya' means 'permanant,' so 'impermanance.' Flux, change, is characteristic of everything whatsoever. There isn't anything at all in the whole world, in the material world, in the psychic world, in the spiritual world, there is nothing you can catch hold of and hang on to for safely. Nuttin'. Not only is there nothing you can hang on to, but by the teaching of anatman, there is no you to hang on to it. In other words, all clinging to life is an illusory hand grasping at smoke. If you can get that into your head and see that that is so, nobody needs to tell you that you ought not to grasp. Because you see, you can't.

See, Buddhism is not essentially moralistic. The moralist is the person who tells people that they ought to be unselfish, when they still feel like egos, and his efforts are always and invariably futile. Because what happens is he simply sweeps the dust under the carpet, and it all comes back again somehow. But in this case, it involves a complete realization that this is the case. So that's what the teacher puts across to begin with.

The next thing that comes up, the second of the noble truths, is about the cause of suffering, and this in Sanskrit is called trishna. Trishna is related to our word 'thirst.' It's very often translated 'desire.' That will do. Better, perhaps, is 'craving, clinging, grasping,' or even, to

use our modern psychological word, 'blocking.' When, for example, somebody is blocked, and dithers and hesitates, and doesn't know what to do, he is in the strictest Buddhist sense attached, he's stuck. But a buddha can't be stuck, he cannot be phased. He always flows, just as water always flows, even if you dam it, the water just keeps on getting higher and higher and higher until it flows over the dam. It's unstoppable.

Now, buddha said, then, dukkha comes from trishna. You all suffer because you cling to the world, and you don't recognize that the world is anitya and anatman. So then, try, if you can, not to grasp. Well, do you see that that immediately poses a problem? Because the student who has started off this dialog with the buddha then makes various efforts to give up desire. Upon which he very rapidly discovers that he is desiring not to desire, and he takes that back to the teacher, who says 'Well, well, well.' He said, 'Of course. You are desiring not to desire, and that's of course excessive. All I want you to do is to give up desiring as much as you can. Don't want to go beyond the point of which you're capable.' And for this reason Buddhism is called the Middle Way. Not only is it the middle way between the extremes of ascetic discipline and pleasure seeking, but it's also the middle way in a very subtle sense. Don't desire to give up more desire than you can. And if you find that a problem, don't desire to be successful in giving up more desire than you can. You see what's happening? Every time he's returned to the middle way, he's moved out of an extreme situation.

Now then, we'll go on; we'll cut out what happens in the pursuit of that method until a little later. The next truth in the list is concerned with the nature of release from dukkha. And so number three is nirvana. Nirvana is the goal of Buddhism; it's the state of liberation corresponding to what the Hindus call moksha. The word means 'blow out,' and it comes from the root 'nir vritti.' Now some people think that what it means is blowing out the flame of desire. I don't believe this. I believe that it means 'breathe out,' rather than 'blow out,' because if you try to hold your breath, and in Indian thought, breath--prana--is the life principle. If you try to hold on to life, you lose it. You can't hold your breath and stay alive; it becomes extremely uncomfortable to hold onto your breath.

And so in exactly the same way, it becomes extremely uncomfortable to spend all your time holding on to your life. What the devil is the point of surviving, going on living, when it's a drag? But you see, that's what people do. They spend enormous efforts on maintaining a certain standard of living, which is a great deal of trouble. You know, you get a nice house in the suburbs, and the first thing you do is you plant a lawn. You've gotta get out and mow the damn thing all the time, and you buy expensive this-that and soon you're all involved in mortgages, and instead of being able to walk out into the garden and enjoy, you sit at your desk and look at your books, filling out this and that and the other and paying bills and answering letters. What a lot of rot! But you see, that is holding onto life. So, translated into colloquial American, nirvana is 'whew!' 'Cause if you let your breath go, it'll come back. So nirvana is not annihilation, it's not disappearance into a sort of undifferentiated void. Nirvana is the state of being let go. It is a state of consciousness, and a state of--you might call it-- being, here and now in this life.

We now come to the most complicated of all, number four: margha[?]. 'Margh' in Sanskrit means 'past,' and the buddha taught an eightfold path for the realization of nirvana. This always reminds me of a story about Dr Suzuki, who is a very, very great Buddhist scholar.

Many years ago, he was giving a fundamental lecture on Buddhism at the University of Hawaii, and he'd been going through these four truths, and he said 'Ah, fourth Noble Truth is Noble Eightfold Path. First step of Noble Eightfold Path called \_sho-ken\_. Sho-ken in Japanese mean `right view.' For Buddhism, fundamentally, is right view. Right way of viewing this world. Second step of Noble Eightfold Path is--oh, I forget second step, you look it up in the book.'

Well, I'm going to do rather the same thing. What is important is this: the eightfold path has really got three divisions in it. The first are concerned with understanding, the second division is concerned with conduct, and the third division is concerned with meditation. And every step in the path is preceded with the Sanskrit word \_samyak\_. In which you remember we ran into \_samadhi\_ last week, 'sam' is the key word. And so, the first step, \_samyak-drishti\_, which mean--'drishti' means a view, a way of looking at things, a vision, an attitude, something like that. But this word samyak is in ordinary texts on Buddhism almost invariably translated 'right.' This is a very bad translation. The word IS used in certain contexts in Sanskrit to mean 'right, correct,' but it has other and wider meanings. 'Sam' means, like our word 'sum,' which is derived from it, 'complete, total, all-embracing.' It also has the meaning of 'middle wade,' representing as it were the fulcrum, the center, the point of balance in a totality. Middle wade way of looking at things. Middle wade way of understanding the dharma. Middle wade way of speech, of conduct, of livelihood, and so on.

Now this is particularly cogent when it comes to Buddhist ideas of behavior. Every Buddhist in all the world, practically, as a layman--he's not a monk--undertakes what are called \_pantasila[?], the Five Good Conducts. 'Sila' is sometimes translated 'precept.' But it's not a precept because it's not a commandment. When Buddhists priests chant the precepts, you know: pranatipada[?]: 'prana (life) tipada (taking away) I promise to abstain from.' So the first is that one undertakes not to destroy life. Second, not to take what is not given. Third--this is usually translated 'not to commit adultery'. It doesn't say anything of the kind. In Sanskrit, it means 'I undertake the precept to abstain from exploiting my passions.' Buddhism has no doctrine about adultery; you may have as many wives as you like.

But the point is this: when you're feeling blue and bored, it's not a good idea to have a drink, because you may become dependant on alcohol whenever you feel unhappy. So in the same way, when you're feeling blue and bored, it's not a good idea to say 'Let's go out and get some chicks.' That's exploiting the passions. But it's not exploiting the passions, you see, when drinking, say expresses the viviality and friendship of the group sitting around the dinner table, or when sex expresses the spontaneous delight of two people in each other.

Then, the fourth precept, \_musavada[?], 'to abstain from false speech.' It doesn't simply mean lying. It means abusing people. It means using speech in a phony way, like saying 'all niggers are thus and so.' Or 'the attitude of America to this situation is thus and thus.' See, that's phony kind of talking. Anybody who studies general semantics will be helped in avoiding musavada, false speech.

The final precept is a very complicated one, and nobody's quite sure exactly what it means. It mentions three kinds of drugs and drinks: sura, mariya[?], maja[?]. We don't know what they are. But at any rate, it's generally classed as narcotics and liquors. Now, there are two

ways of translating this precept. One says to abstain from narcotics and liquors; the other liberal translation favored by the great scholar Dr [?] is 'I abstain from being intoxicated by these things.' So if you drink and don't get intoxicated, it's ok. You don't have to be a teatotaler to be a Buddhist. This is especially true in Japan and China; my goodness, how they throw it down! A scholarly Chinese once said to me, 'You know, before you start meditating, just have a couple martinis, because it increases your progress by about six months.'

Now you see these are, as I say, they are not commandments, they are vows. Buddhism has in it no idea of there being a moral law laid down by somekind of cosmic lawgiver. The reason why these precepts are undertaken is not for a sentimental reason. It is not that you're going to make you into a good person. It is that for anybody interested in the experiments necessary for liberation, these ways of life are expedient. First of all, if you go around killing, you're going to make enemies, and you're going to have to spend a lot of time defending yourself, which will distract you from your yoga. If you go around stealing, likewise, you're going to acquire a heap of stuff, and again, you're going to make enemies. If you exploit your passions, you're going to get a big thrill, but it doesn't last. When you begin to get older, you realize 'Well that was fun while we had it, but I haven't really learned very much from it, and now what?' Same with speech. Nothing is more confusing to the mind than taking words too seriously. We've seen so many examples of that. And finally, to get intoxicated or narcotized--a narcotic is anything like alcohol or opium which makes you sleepy. The word 'narcosis' in Greek, 'narc' means 'sleep.' So, if you want to pass your life seeing things through a dim haze, this is not exactly awakening.

So, so much for the conduct side of Buddhism. We come then to the final parts of the eightfold path. There are two concluding steps, which are called \_samyak-smriti\_ and \_samyak-samadhi\_. \_Smriti\_ means 'recollection, memory, present-mindedness.' Seems rather funny that the same word can mean 'recollection or memory' and 'present-mindedness.' But smriti is exactly what that wonderful old rascal Gurdjieff meant by 'self-awareness,' or 'self-remembering.' Smriti is to have complete presence of mind.

There is a wonderful meditation called 'The House that Jack Built Meditation,' at least that's what I call it, that the Southern Buddhists practice. He walks, and he says to himself, 'There is the lifting of the foot.' The next thing he says is 'There is a perception of the lifting of the foot.' And the next, he says 'There is a tendency towards the perception of the feeling of the lifting of the foot.' Then finally he says, 'There is a consciousness of the tendency of the perception of the feeling of the lifting of the foot.' And so, with everything that he does, he knows that he does it. He is self-aware. This is tricky. Of course, it's not easy to do. But as you practice this--I'm going to let the cat out of the bag, which I suppose I shouldn't do--but you will find that there are so many things to be aware of at any given moment in what you're doing, that at best you only ever pick out one or two of them. That's the first thing you'll find out. Ordinary conscious awareness is seeing the world with blinkers on. As we say, you can think of only one thing at a time. That's because ordinary consciousness is narrowed consciousness. It's being narrow-minded in the true sense of the word, looking at things that way. Then you find out in the course of going around being aware all of the time--what are you doing when you remember? Or when you think about the future? 'I am aware that I am remembering'? 'I am aware that I am thinking about the future'?

But you see, what eventually happens is that you discover that there isn't any way of being absent-minded. All thoughts are in the present and of the present. And when you discover that, you approach samadhi. Samadhi is the complete state, the fulfilled state of mind. And you will find many, many different ideas among the sects of Buddhists and Hindus as to what samadhi is. Some people call it a trance, some people call it a state of consciousness without anything in it, knowing with no object of knowledge. All these are varying opinions. I had a friend who was a Zen master, and he used to talk about samadhi, and he said a very fine example of samadhi is a fine horserider. When you watch a good cowboy, he is one being with the horse. So an excellent driver in a car makes the car his own body, and he absolutely is with it. So also a fine pair of dancers. They don't have to shove each other to get one to do what the other wants him to do. They have a way of understanding each other, of moving together as if they were siamese twins. That's samadhi, on the physical, ordinary, everyday level. The samadhi of which buddha speaks is the state which, as it is, the gateway to nirvana, the state in which the illusion of the ego as a separate thing disintegrates.

Now, when we get to that point in Buddhism, Buddhists do a funny thing, which is going to occupy our attention for a good deal of this seminar. They don't fall down and worship. They don't really have any name for what it is that is, really and basically. The idea of anatman, of non-self, is applied in Buddhism not only to the individual ego, but also to the notion that there is a self of the universe, a kind of impersonal or personal god, and so it is generally supposed that Buddhism is generally atheistic. It's true, depending on what you mean by atheism. Common or garden atheism is a form of belief, namely that I believe there is no god--and Hans Enkel[?] is its prophet. (I'm speaking of a famous atheist). The atheist positively denies the existence of any god. All right. Now, there is such an atheist, if you put dash between the 'a' and 'theist,' or speak about something called 'atheos'--'theos' in Greek means 'god'--but what is a non-god? A non-god is an inconceivable something or other.

I love the story about a debate in the Houses of Parliament in England, where, as you know, the Church of England is established and under control of the government, and the high ecclesiastics had petitioned Parliament to let them have a new prayerbook. Somebody got up and said 'It's perfectly ridiculous that Parliament should decide on this, because as we well know, there are quite a number of atheists in these benches.' And somebody got up and said 'Oh, I don't think there are really any atheists. We all believe in some sort of something somewhere.'

Now again, of course, it isn't that Buddhism believes in some sort of something somewhere, and that is to say in vagueness. Here is the point: if you believe, if you have certain propositions that you want to assert about the ultimate reality, or what Portilli[?] calls 'the ultimate ground of being,' you are talking nonsense. Because you can't say something specific about everything. You see, supposing you wanted to say 'God has a shape.' But if god is all that there is, then God doesn't have any outside, so he can't have a shape. You have to have an outside and space outside it to have a shape. So that's why the Hebrews, too, are against people making images of God. But nonetheless, Jews and Christians persistently make images of God, not necessarily in pictures and statues, but they make images in their minds. And those are much more insidious images.

Buddhism is not saying that the Self, the great atman, or whatnot, it isn't denying that the

experience which corresponds to these words is realizable. What it is saying is that if you make conceptions and doctrines about these things, your liable to become attached to them. You're liable to start believing instead of knowing. So they say in Zen Buddhism, 'The doctrine of Buddhism is a finger pointing at the moon. Do not mistake the finger for the moon.' Or so we might say in the West, the idea of God is a finger pointing at God, but what most people do is instead of following the finger, they suck it for comfort. And so buddha chopped off the finger, and undermined all metaphysical beliefs. There are many, many dialogues in the Pali scriptures where people try to corner the buddha into a metaphysical position. 'Is the world eternal?' The buddha says nothing. 'Is the world not eternal?' And he answers nuttin'. 'Is the world both eternal and not eternal?' And he don't say nuttin'. 'Is the world neither eternal nor not eternal?' And STILL he don't say nuttin'. He maintains what is called the noble silence. Sometimes called the thunder of silence, because this silence, this metaphysical silence, is not a void. It is very powerful. This silence is the open window through which you can see not concepts, not ideas, not beliefs, but the very goods. But if you say what it is that you see, you erect an image and an idol, and you misdirect people. It's better to destroy people's beliefs than to give them beliefs. I know it hurts, but it is The Way.

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### ALAN WATTS: THE WORLD AS EMPTINESS, pt 2 of 3

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You must understand as one of the fundamental points of Buddhism, the idea of the world as being in flux. I gave you this morning the Sanskrit word *\_anitya\_* as one of the characteristics of being, emphasized by the buddha along with *\_anatman\_*, the unreality of a permanant self, and *\_duhkha\_*, the sense of frustration. Duhkha really arises from a person's failure to accept the other two characteristics: lack of permanant self and change.

You see, in Buddhism, the feeling that we have of an enduring organism--I meet you today and I see you, and then tomorrow I meet you again, and you look pretty much as you looked yesterday, and so I consider that you're the same person, but you aren't. Not really. When I watch a whirlpool in a stream, here's the stream flowing along, and there's always a whirlpool like the one at Niagra. But that whirlpool never, never really holds any water. The water is all the time rushing through it. In the same way, a university, the University of California--what is it? The students exchange at least every four years; the faculty changes at a somewhat slower rate; the building changes, they knock down old ones and put up new ones; the administration changes. So what is the University of California? It's a pattern. A doing of a particular kind. And so in just precisely that way, every one of us is a whirlpool in the tide of existence, and where every cell in our body, every every molocule, every atom is in constant flux, and nothing can be pinned down.

You know, you can put bands on pigeons, or migrating birds, and identify them and follow them, and find out where they go. But you can't tag atoms, much less electrons. They have a curious way of appearing and disappearing, and one of the great puzzles in physics is What are electons doing when we're not looking at them? Because our observation of them has to modify their behavior. We can't see an electron without putting it in an experimental situation where our examination of it in some way changes it. What we would like to know is what it is doing when we're not looking at it. Like does the light in the refrigerator really go off when we close the door?

But this is fundamental, you see, to Buddhist philosophy. The philosophy of change. From one point of view, change is just too bad. Everything flows away, and there's a kind of sadness in that, a kind of nostalgia, and there may even be a rage. 'Go not gently into that good night, but rage, rage, at the dying of the light.'

But there's something curious--there can be a very fundamental change in one's attitude to the question of the world as fading. On the one hand resentment, and on the other delight. If you resist change--of course, you must, to some extent. When you meet another person, you don't want to be thoroughly rejected, but you love to feel a little resistance. Don't you, you know? You have a beautiful girl, and you touch her. You don't want her to go 'Blah!' But so round, so firm, so fully packed! A little bit of resistance, you see, is great. So there must always be resistance in change; otherwise there couldn't even be change. There'd just be a 'pfft!' The world would go 'pfft!' and that'd be the end of it.

But because there's always some resistance to change, there is a wonderful manifestation of form, there is a dance of life. But the human mind, as distinct from most animal minds, is terribly aware of time. And so we think a great deal about the future, and we know that every visible form is going to disappear and be replaced by so-called others. Are these others, others? Or are they the same forms returning? Of course, that's a great puzzle. Are next year's leaves that come from a tree going to be the same as this year's leaves? What do you mean by the same? They'll be the same shape, they'll have the same botanical characteristics. But you'll be able to pick up a shriveled leaf from last autumn and say 'Look at the difference. This is last year's leaf; this is this year's leaf.' And in that sense, they're not the same.

What happens when any great musician plays a certain piece of music? He plays it today, and then he plays it again tomorrow. Is it the same piece of music, or is it another? In the Pali language, they say *\_naja-so, naja-ano[?]* which means 'not the same, yet not another.' So, in this way, the Buddhist is able to speak of reincarnation of beings, without having to believe in some kind of soul entity that is reincarnated. Some kind of atman, some kind of fixed self, ego principle, soul principle that moves from one life to another. And this is as true in our lives as they go on now from moment to moment as it would be true of our lives as they appear and reappear again over millions of years. It doesn't make the slightest difference, except that there are long intervals and short intervals, high vibrations and low vibrations. When you hear a high sound, high note in the musical scale, you can't see any holes in it--it's going too fast--and it sounds completely continuous. But when you get the lowest audible notes that you can hear on an organ, you feel the shaking. You feel the vibration, you hear that music [throbbing] on and off.

So in the same way as we live now from day to day, we experience ourselves living at a high rate of vibration, and we appear to be continuous, although there is the rhythm of waking and sleeping. But the rhythm that runs from generation to generation and from life to life is much slower, and so we notice the gaps. We don't notice the gaps when the rhythm is fast. So we are living, as it were, on many, many levels of rhythm.

So this is the nature of change. If you resist it, you have *duhkha*, you have frustration and suffering. But on the other hand, if you understand change, you don't cling to it, and you let

it flow, then it's no problem. It becomes positively beautiful, which is why in poetry, the theme of the evernescence[?] of the world is beautiful. When Shelly says,

The one remains, the many change and pass,  
heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly.  
Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,  
stains the white radiance of eternity  
until death shatters it to fragments.

Now what's beautiful in that? Is it heaven's light that shines forever? Or is it rather the dome of many-colored glass that shatters? See, it's always the image of change that really makes the poem.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
creeps on life's petty pace from day to day,  
until the last syllable of recorded time.

Somehow, you know, it's so well-said that it's not so bad after all. The poet has got the intuition that things are always running out, that things are always disappearing, has some hidden marvel in it. I was discussing with someone during the lunch intermission, the Japanese have a word *yugen*, which has no English equivalent whatsoever. *Yugen* is in a way digging change. It's described poetically, you have the feeling of *yugen* when you see out in the distant water some ships hidden behind a far-off island. You have the feeling of *yugen* when you watch wild geese suddenly seen and then lost in the clouds. You have the feeling of *yugen* when you look across Mt Tamapeis, and you've never been to the other side, and you see the sky beyond. You don't go over there to look and see what's on the other side, that wouldn't be *yugen*. You let the other side be the other side, and it invokes something in your imagination, but you don't attempt to define it to pin it down. *Yugen*.

So in the same way, the coming and going of things in the world is marvelous. They go. Where do they go? Don't answer, because that would spoil the mystery. They vanish into the mystery. But if you try to persue them, you destroy *yugen*. That's a very curious thing, but that idea of *yugen*, which in Chinese characters means, as it were, kind of 'the deep mystery of the valley.' There's a poem in Chinese which says 'The wind drops, but the petals keep falling. The bird calls, and the mountain becomes more mysterious.' Isn't that strange? There's no wind anymore, and yet petals are dropping. And a bird in the canyon cries, and that one sound in the mountains brings out the silence with a wallop.

I remember when I was almost a child in the Pyrenees in the southwest of France. We went way up in this gorgeous silence of the mountains, but in the distance we could hear the bells on the cows clanking. And somehow those tiny sounds brought out the silence. And so in the same way, slight permanances bring out change. And they give you this very strange sense. *Yugen*. The mystery of change. You know, in Elliot's poem, 'The Four Quartets,' where he says 'The dark, dark, dark. They all go into the dark, distinguished families, members of the book of the director of directors, everybody, they all go into the dark.' Life IS life, you see, because, just because it's always disappearing. Supposing suddenly, by

some kind of diabolical magic, I could say 'zzzip!' and every one of you would stay the same age forever. You'd be like Madam Trusseau's wax works. It'd be awful! In a thousand years from now, what beautiful hags you would be.

So, the trouble is, that we have one-sided minds, and we notice the wave of life when it is at its peak or crest. We don't notice it when it's at the trough, not in the ordinary way. It's the peaks that count. Take a buzzsaw: what seems important to us is the tips of the teeth. They do the cutting, not the valleys between the teeth. But see, you couldn't have tips of teeth without the valleys between. Therefore the saw wouldn't cut without both tips and V-shaped valleys. But we ignore that. We don't notice the valleys so much as we notice the mountains. Valleys point down, mountains point up, and we prefer things that point up, because up is good and down is bad.

But seriously, we don't blame the peaks for being high and the valleys for being low. But it is so, you see, that we ignore the valley aspect of things, and so all wisdom begins by emphasizing the valley aspect as distinct from the peak aspect. We pay plenty of attention to the peak aspect, that's what captures our attention, but we somehow screen out the valley aspect. But that makes us very uncomfortable. It seems we want and get pleasure from looking at the peaks, but actually this denies our pleasure, because secretly we know that every peak is followed by a valley. The valley of the shadow of death.

And we're always afraid, because we're not used to looking at valleys, because we're not used to living with them, they represent to us the strange and threatening unknown. Maybe we're afraid the principle of the valley will conquer, and the peaks will be overwhelmed. Maybe death is stronger than life, because life always seems to require an effort; death is something into which you slide effortlessly. Maybe nothing will overcome something in the end. Wouldn't that be awful? And so we resist change, ignorant of the fact that change is life, and that nothing is invariably the adverse face of something.

For such purposes, I have to give you a very elementary lesson about the properties of space. Because most people are afraid of space. They ignore it, and they think space is nothing. Space is simply, unless it happens to be filled with air, a nothingness between things. But without space, there is no energy and no motion, and it can be illustrated in this way: in this area is the whole universe, and there's only one thing in it, and that's a ball. Is it moving, or is it still? There's absolutely no way of deciding. None whatever. So it's neither moving, nor is it still, because you can't be aware of or measure motion, except in relation to something that's relatively still. All right, let's have two balls. Ball one, and ball two. Now, these balls--we suddenly notice that the distance between them increases. Which one moved? Or did they both move? there's no way of deciding. You could say the distance, ie, the space between them increased. But who started it is impossible to determine. All right, three balls. Now, we notice for example that one and three stay together, and they keep a constant distance apart. But two goes away and comes back. Now what's happening? One and three, since they stay together, constitute a group. Two recedes or approaches, or does it? Or is the group one and three receding from or approaching towards two? There's one way of deciding. One and three constitute a majority. So if they vote, they can say whether they are going towards two or going away from two. Two doesn't like this. So two decides it can lick 'em by joining them, so two comes and sits here. Now what's going to happen?

Neither one and three can say to two, and two can't say to three, 'Why do you keep following me around?' Because again, because they all maintain a constant distance, they have no motion.

All right. We have the same problem on a very big scale, in what we call the expansion of the universe. All the galaxies observable seem to be getting further away from each other. Now, are they going further away from us, or are we going further away from them, or are they all all together going further away from each other? Astronomers have suggested that what is expanding is the space between them. And so we get the idea of expanding space. This isn't quite the right answer. What has been neglected in all this, if I can say either that the objects are moving away from each other, they're doing it. Or it's equally possible for me to say that it's the space they're in that's expanding. But I can't decide which one is which. The meaning of this inability to decide is that space and solid are two ways of talking about the same thing. Space-solid. You don't find space without solids; you don't find solids without space. If I say there's a universe in which there isn't anything but space, you must say 'Space between what?' Space is relationship, and it always goes together with solid, like back goes with front. But the devisive mind ignores space. And it thinks it's the solids that do the whole job, that they're the only thing that's real. That is, to put it in other words, conscious attention ignores intervals, because it thinks they're unimportant.

Let's consider music. When you hear music, most people think that what they hear is a succession of notes or tones. If all you heard when you listen to music were a succession of tones, you would hear no melody, and no harmony. You would hear nothing but a succession of noises. What you really hear when you hear melody is the interval between one tone and another. The steps as it were on the scale. If you can't hear that, you're tone-deaf and don't enjoy music at all. It's the interval that's the important thing. So in the same way, in the intervals between this year's leaves, last year's leaves, this generation of people and that generation, the interval is in some ways just as important, in some ways more important than what it's between. Actually they go together, but I say the interval is sometimes more important because we underemphasize it, so I'm going to overemphasize it as a correction. So space, night, death, darkness, not being there is an essential component of being there. You don't have the one without the other, just as your buzzsaw has no teeth without having valleys between the tips of them. That's the way being is made up.

So then, in Buddhism, change is emphasized. First, to unsettle people who think that they can achieve permanance by hanging on to life. And it seems that the preacher is wagging his finger at them and saying 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' So all the preachers together say 'Don't cling to those things.' So then, as a result of that, and now I'm going to speak in strictly Buddhist terms, the follower of the way of buddha seeks deliverance from attachment to the world of change. He seeks nirvana, the state beyond change, which the buddha called the unborn, the unoriginated, the uncreated, and the unformed. But then, you see, what he finds out is in seeking a state beyond change, seeking nirvana as something away from samsara, which is the name for the wheel, he is still seeking something permanant. And so, as Buddhism went on, they thought about this a great deal. And this very point was the point of division between the two great schools of Buddhism, which in the south, as I explained, were Theravada, the doctrine of the Thera, the elders, sometimes known, disrespectfully, as the Hinayana. 'Yana' means 'a vehicle, a conveyance, or a

ferryboat.' This is a yana, and I live on a ferryboat because that's my job. Then there is the other school of Buddhism, called the Mahayana. 'Maha' means 'great'; 'hina,' little. The great vehicle and the little vehicle.

Now, what is this? The Mahayanas say 'You're little just get a few people who are very, very tough ascetics, and takes them across the shore to nirvana.' But the great vehicle shows people that nirvana is not different from everyday life. So that when you have reached nirvana, if you think 'Now I have attained it, now I have succeeded, now I have caught the secret of the universe, and I am at peace,' you have only a false peace. You have become a stone buddha. You have a new illusion of the changeless. So it is said that such a person is a pratyeka-buddha. That means 'private buddha.' 'I've got it all for myself.' And in contrast with this kind of pratyeka- buddha, who gains nirvana and stays there, the Mahayanas use the word bodhisattva. 'Sattva' means 'essential principle'; 'bodhi,' awakening. A person whose essential being is awakened. The word used to mean 'junior buddha,' someone on the way to becoming a buddha. But in the course of time, it came to mean someone who had attained buddhahood, who had reached nirvana, but who returns into everyday life to deliver everyday beings. This is the popular idea of a bodhisattva--a savior.

So, in the popular Buddhism of Tibet and China and Japan, people worship the bodhisattvas, the great bodhisattvas, as saviors. Say, the one I talked about this morning, the hermaphroditic Quan-Yin[?]. People loved Quan-Yin because she--he/she, she/he--could be a buddha, but has come back into the world to save all beings. The Japanese call he/she Kanon[?], and they have in Kyoto an image of Kanon with one thousand arms, radiating like an aureole all around this great golden figure, and these thousand arms are one thousand different ways of rescuing beings from ignorance. Kanon is a funny thing. I remember one night when I suddenly realized that Kanon was incarnate in the whole city of Kyoto, that this whole city was Kanon, that the police department, the taxi drivers, the fire department, the shopkeepers, in so far as this whole city was a collaborate effort to sustain human life, however bumbling, however inefficient, however corrupt, it was still a manifestation of Kanon, with its thousand arms, all working independantly, and yet as one.

So they revere those bodhisattvas as the saviors, come back into the world to deliver all beings. But there is a more esoteric interpretation of this. The bodhisattva returns into the world. That means he has discovered that you don't have to go anywhere to find nirvana. Nirvana is where you are, provided you don't object to it. In other words, change--and everything is change; nothing can be held on to--to the degree that you go with a stream, you see, you are still, you are flowing with it. But to the degree you resist the stream, then you notice that the current is rushing past you and fighting you. So swim with it, go with it, and you're there. You're at rest. And this is of course particularly true when it comes to those moments when life really seems to be going to take us away, and the stream of change is going to swallow us completely. The moment of death, and we think, 'Oh-oh, this is it. This is the end.' And so at death we withdraw, say 'No, no, no, not that, not yet, please.'

But, actually, the whole problem is that there really is no other problem for human beings, than to go over that waterfall when it comes. Just as you go over any other waterfall, just as you go on from day-to-day, just as you go to sleep at night. Be absolutely willing to die. Now, I'm not preaching. I'm not saying you OUGHT to be willing to die, and that you

should muscle up your courage and somehow put on a good front when the terrible thing comes. That's not the idea at all. The point is that you can only die well if you understand this system of ways. If you understand that your disappearance as the form in which you think you are you. Your disappearance as this particular organism is simply seasonal. That you are just as much the dark space beyond death as you are the light interval called life. These are just two sides of you, because YOU is the total way. You see, we can't have half a way. Nobody ever saw waves that just had crests, and no troughs. So you can't have half a human being, who is born but doesn't die. Half a thing. That would be only half a thing. But the propagation of vibrations, and life is vibration, it simply goes on and on, but its cycles are short cycles and long cycles.

Space, you see, is not just nothing. If I could magnify my hand to an enormous degree so you could see all the molecules in it, I don't know how far apart they would be, but it seems to me they would be something like tennis balls in a very, very large space, and you'd look when I move my hand, and say 'For god's sake, look at all those tennis balls, they're all going together. Crazy. And there are no strings tying them together. Isn't that queer?' No, but there's space going with them, and space is a function of, or it's an inseparable aspect of whatever solids are in the space. That is the clue, probably, to what we mean by gravity. We don't know yet. So in the same way, when those marvelous sandpipers come around here, the little ones. While they're in the air flying, they have one mind, they move all together. When they alight on the mud, they become individuals and they go pecking around for worms or whatever. But one click of the fingers and all those things go up into the air. They don't seem to have a leader, because they don't follow when they turn; they all turn together and go off in a different direction. It's amazing. But they're like the molecules in my hand.

So then, you see, here's the principle: when you don't resist change, I mean over resist. I don't mean being flabby, like I said at the beginning. When you don't resist change, you see that the changing world, which disappears like smoke, is no different from the nirvana world. Nirvana, as I said, means breathe out, let go of the breath. So in the same way, don't resist change; it's all the same principle.

So the bodhisattva saves all beings, not by preaching sermons to them, but by showing them that they are delivered, they are liberated, by the act of not being able to stop changing. You can't hang on to yourself. You don't have to try to not hang on to yourself. It can't be done, and that is salvation. That's why you may think it a grisly habit, but certain monks keep skulls on their desks, 'momentomori,' 'be mindful of death.' Gurdjieff says in one of his books that the most important thing for anyone to realize is that you and every person you see will soon be dead. It sounds so gloomy to us, because we have devised a culture fundamentally resisting death. There is a wonderful saying that Anandakuri-Swami<sup>[?]</sup> used to quote: 'I pray that death will not come and find me still unannihilated.' In other words, that man dies happy if there is no one to die. In other words, if the ego's disappeared before death caught up to him.

But you see, the knowledge of death helps the ego to disappear, because it tells you you can't hang on. So what we need, if we're going to have a good religion around, that's one of the places where it can start: having, I suppose they'd call it The Institution For Creative Dying, something like that. You can have one department where you can have champaign

and cocktail parties to die with, another department where you can have glorious religious rituals with priests and things like that, another department where you can have psychedelic drugs, another department where you can have special kinds of music, anything, you know. All these arrangements will be provided for in a hospital for delightful dying. But that's the thing, to go out with a bang instead of a whimper.

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### ALAN WATTS: THE WORLD AS EMPTINESS, pt 3 of 3

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I was talking a great deal yesterday afternoon about the Buddhist attitude to change, to death, to the transience of the world, and was showing that preachers of all kinds stir people up in the beginning by alarming them about change. That's like somebody actually raising an alarm, just the same way as if I want to pay you a visit I ring the doorbell, and then we can come in and I don't need to raise an alarm anymore. So in the same way, it sounds terrible, you see, that everything is going to die and pass away, and here you are, thinking that happiness, sanity, and security consist in clinging on to things which can't be clung to, and in any case there isn't anybody to cling to them. The whole thing is a weaving of smoke.

So, that's the initial standpoint, but, as soon as you really discover this, and you stop clinging to change, then everything is quite different. It becomes amazing. Not only do all your senses become more wide awake, not only do you feel almost as if you're walking on air, but you see, finally, that there is no duality, no difference between the ordinary world and the nirvana world. They're the same world, but what makes the difference is the point of view. And of course, if you keep identifying yourself with some sort of stable entity that sits and watches the world go by, you don't acknowledge your union, your inseparability from everything that there is. You go by with all the rest of the things, but if you insist on trying to take a permanent stand, on trying to be a permanent witness of the flux, then it grates against you, and you feel very uncomfortable.

But it is a fundamental feeling in most of us that we are such witnesses. We feel that behind the stream of our thoughts, of our feelings, of our experiences, there is something which is the thinker, the feeler, and the experiencer. Not recognizing that that is itself a thought, feeling, or experience, and it belongs within and not outside the changing panorama of experience. It's what you call a cue signal. In other words, when you telephone, and your telephone conversation is being tape recorded, it's the law that there shall be a beep every so many seconds, and that beep cues you in to the fact that this conversation is recorded. So in a very similar way, in our everyday experience there's a beep which tells us this is a continuous experience which is mine. Beep!

In the same way, for example, it is a cue signal when a composer arranges some music, and he keeps in it a recurrent theme, but he makes many variations on it. That, or more subtle still, he keeps within it a consistent style, so you know that it's Mozart all the way along, because that sounds like Mozart. But there isn't, as it were, a constant noise going all the way through to tell you it's continuous, although, in Hindu music, they do have something called the drone. There is, behind all the drums and every kind of singing, and it always sounds the note which is the tonic of the scale being used. But in Hindu music, that drone represents the eternal self, the brahman, behind all the changing forms of nature. But that's only a symbol, and to find out what is eternal--you can't make an image of it; you can't hold

on to it. And so it's psychologically more conducive to liberation to remember that the thinker, or the feeler, or the experiencer, and the experiences are all together. They're all one. But, if out of anxiety, you try to stabilize, keep permanent, the separate observer, you are in for conflict.

Of course, the separate observer, the thinker of the thoughts, is an abstraction which we create out of memory. We think of the self, the ego, rather, as a repository of memories, a kind of safety deposit box, or record, or filing cabinet place where all our experiences are stored. Now, that's not a very good idea. It's more that memory is a dynamic system, not a storage system. It's a repetition of rhythms, and these rhythms are all part and parcel of the ongoing flow of present experience. In other words, first of all, how do you distinguish between something known now, and a memory? Actually, you don't know anything at all until you remember it. Because if something happens that is purely instantaneous--if a light flashes, or, to be more accurate, if there is a flash, lasting only one millionth of a second, you probably wouldn't experience it, because it wouldn't give you enough time to remember it.

We say in customary speech, 'Well, it has to make an impression.' So in a way, all present knowledge is memory, because you look at something, and for a while the rods and cones in your retina respond to that, and they do their stuff--jiggle, jiggle, jiggle--and so as you look at things, they set up a series of echoes in your brain. And these echoes keep reverberating, because the brain is very complicated. But you then see--first of all, everything you know is remembered, but there is a way in which we distinguish between seeing somebody here now, and the memory of having seen somebody else who's not here now, but whom you did see in the past, and you know perfectly well, when you remember that other person's face, it's not an experience of the person being here. How is this? Because memory signals have a different cue attached to them than present time signals. They come on a different kind of vibration. Sometimes, however, the wiring gets mixed up, and present experiences come to us with a memory cue attached to them, and then we have what is called a \_deja vu\_ experience: we're quite sure we've experienced this thing before.

But the problem that we don't see, don't ordinarily recognize, is that although memory is a series of signals with a special kind of cue attached to them so we don't confuse them with present experience, they are actually all part of the same thing as present experience, they are all part of this constantly flowing life process, and there is no separate witness standing aside from the process, watching it go by. You're all involved in it.

Now, accepting that, you see, going with that, although at first it sounds like the knell of doom, is if you don't clutch it anymore, splendid. That's why I said death should be occasion for a great celebration, that people should say 'Happy death!' to you, and always surround death with joyous rites, because this is the opportunity for the greatest of all experiences, when you can finally let go because you know there's nothing else to do.

There was a \_kamikaze\_ pilot who escaped because his plane that he was flying at an American aircraft carrier went wrong, and he landed in the water instead of hitting the plane, so he survived. But he said afterwards that he had the most extraordinary state of exaltation. It wasn't a kind of patriotic ecstasy, but the very thought that in a moment he would cease to

exist--he would just be gone--for some mysterious reason that he couldn't understand, made him feel absolutely like a god. And when I talk to a certain German sage whose name is Count Van Derkheim[?], he said that during the war this happened to people again and again and again. He said they heard the bombs screaming down over their heads, and knew this was the last moment, or that they were in a concentration camp with absolutely no hope of getting out, or that they were displaced in such a way that their whole career was shattered. He said in each of these cases, when anybody accepted the situation as totally inevitable, they suddenly got this amazing kind of enlightenment experience of freedom from ego. Well, they tried to explain it to their friends when it was over and everything had settled down again, and their friends said 'Well, you were under such pressure that you must have gone a little crazy.' But Van Derkheim said 'A great deal of my work is to reassure these people that in that moment there was a moment of truth, and they really saw how things are.'

Well then, in Buddhist philosophy, this sort of annihilation of oneself, this acceptance of change is the doctrine of the world as the void. This doctrine did not emerge very clearly, very prominently, in Buddhism until quite a while after Guatama the buddha had lived. We begin to find this, though, becoming prominent about the year 100 BC, and by 200 AD, it had reached its peak. And this was developed by the Mahayana Buddhists, and it is the doctrine of a whole class of literature which goes by this complex name: \_prajna-paramita\_. Now 'prajna' means 'wisdom.' 'Paramita,' a crossing over, or going beyond, and there is a small prajna-paramita sutra, a big prajna-paramita sutra, and then there's a little short summary of the whole thing called the Heart Sutra, and that is recited by Buddhists all over Northern Asia, Tibet, China, and Japan, and it contains the saying 'that which is void is precisely the world of form, that which is form is precisely the void.' Form is emptiness, emptiness is form, and so on, and it elaborates on this theme. It's very short, but it's always chanted at important Buddhist ceremonies. And so, it is supposed by scholars of all kinds who have a missionary background that the Buddhists are nihilists, that they teach that the world is really nothing, there isn't anything, and that there seems to be something is purely an illusion. But of course this philosophy is much more subtle than that.

The main person who is responsible for developing and maturing this philosophy was Nagarjuna, and he lived about 200 AD. One of the most astonishing minds that the human race has ever produced. And the name of Nagarjuna's school of thought is \_Madhyamika\_, which means, really, 'the doctrine of the middle way.' But it's sometimes also called 'the doctrine of emptiness,' or \_Sunyavada\_, from the basic word 'sunya,' or sometimes 'sunya' has 'ta' added on the end, and that 'ta' means 'ness'--'emptiness.'

Well, then, first of all, emptiness means, essentially, 'transience,' that's the first thing it means. Nothing to grasp, nothing permanent, nothing to hold on to. But it means this with special reference to ideas of reality, ideas of god, ideas of the self, the brahman, anything you like. What it means is that reality escapes all concepts. If you say there is a god, that is a concept; if you say there is no god, that's a concept. And Nagarjuna is saying that always your concepts will prove to be attempts to catch water in a sieve, or wrap it up in a parcel. So he invented a method of teaching Buddhism which was an extension of the dialectic method that the buddha himself first used. And this became the great way of studying, especially at the University of Nalanda[?], which has been reestablished in modern times, but of course it was destroyed by the Muslims when they invaded India. The University of

Nalanda, where the dialectic method of enlightenment was taught.

The dialectic method is perfectly simple; it can be done with an individual student and a teacher, or with a group of students and a teacher, and you would be amazed how effective it is when it involves precious little more than discussion. Some of you no doubt have attended tea groups, blab-blabs, or whatever they're called, things of that kind, in which people are there, and they don't know quite why they're there, and there's some sort of so-called resource person to disturb them. And after a while they get the most incredible emotions. Somebody tries to dominate the discussion of the group, say, and then the group kind of goes into the question of why he's trying to dominate it, and so on and so forth. Well, these were the original blab-blabs, and they have been repeated in modern times with the most startling effects. That is to say, the teacher gradually elicits from his participant students what are their basic premises of life. What is your metaphysic, in the sense--I'm not using metaphysic in a kind of spiritual sense, but what are your basic assumptions? What real ideas do you operate on as to what is right and what is wrong, what is the good life and what is not. What arguments are you going to argue strongest? Where do you take your stand? The teacher soon finds this out, for each individual concerned, and then he demolishes it. He absolutely takes away that person's compass. And so they start getting very frightened, and say to the teacher, 'All right, I see now, of course I can't depend on this, but what should I depend on?' And unfortunately, the teacher doesn't offer any alternative suggestions, but simply goes on to examine the question, Why do you think you have to have something to depend on? Now, this is kept up over quite a period, and the only thing that keeps the students from going insane is the presence of the teacher, who seems to be perfectly happy, but isn't proposing any ideas. He's only demolishing them.

So we get, finally, but not quite finally, to the void, the sunya, and what then? Well, when you get to the void, there is an enormous and unbelievable sense of relief. That's nirvana. 'Whew!', as I gave a proper English translation of nirvana. So they are liberated, and yet, they can't quite say why or what it is they found out, so they call it the void. But Nagarjuna went on to say 'You mustn't cling to the void.' You have to void the void. And so the void of nonvoid is the great state, as it were, of Nagarjuna's Buddhism. But you must remember that all that has been voided, all that has been denied, are those concepts in which one has hitherto attempted to pin down what is real.

In Zen Buddhist texts, they say 'You cannot nail a peg into the sky.' And so, to be a man of the sky, a man of the void, is also called 'a man not depending on anything.' And when you're not hung on anything, you are the only thing that isn't hung on anything, which is the universe, which doesn't hang, you see. Where would it hang? It has no place to fall on, even though it may be dropping; there will never be the crash of it landing on a concrete floor somewhere. But the reason for that is that it won't crash below because it doesn't hang above. And so there is a poem in Chinese which speaks of such a person as having above, not a tile to cover the head; below, not an inch of ground on which to stand.

And you see, this which to people like us, who are accustomed to rich imageries of the divine--the loving father in heaven, who has laid down the eternal laws, oh word of god incarnate, oh wisdom from above, oh truth unchanged unchanging, oh light of life and love. Then how does it go on? Something about he's written it all in the bible, the wisdom from

which the hallowed page, a lantern for our footsteps, shines out from age to age. See, so that's very nice. We feel we know where we are, and that it's all been written down, and that in heaven the lord god resplendant with glory, with all the colors of the rainbow, with all the saints and angels around, and everything like that. So we feel that's positive, that we've got a real rip-roaring gutsy religion full of color and so on. But it doesn't work that way.

The more clear your image of god, the less powerful it is, because you're clinging to it, the more it's an idol. But voiding it completely isn't going to turn it into what you think of as void. What would you think of as void? Being lost in a fog, so that it's white all around, and you can't see in any direction. Being in the darkness. Or the color of your head as perceived by your eyes. That's probably the best illustration that we would think of as a void, because it isn't black, it isn't white, it isn't anything. But that's still not the void. Take the lesson from the head. How does your head look to your eyes? Well, I tell you, it looks like what you see out in front of you, because all that you see out in front of you is how you feel inside your head. So it's the same with this.

And so, for this reason, the great sixth patriarch, Hui-Neng, in China, said it was a great mistake for those who are practicing Buddhist meditation to try to make their minds empty. And a lot of people tried to do that. They sat down and tried to have no thoughts whatsoever in their minds. Not only no thoughts, but no sense experiences, so they'd close their eyes, they'd plug up their ears, and generally go into sensory deprivation. Well, sensory deprivation, if you know how to handle it, can be quite interesting. It'll have the same sort of results as taking LSD or something like that, and there are special labs nowadays where you can be sensorily deprived to an amazing degree.

But if you're a good yogi this doesn't bother you at all, sends some people crazy. But if you did this world, you can have a marvelous time in a sensory deprivation scene. Also, especially, if they get you into a condition of weightlessness. Skin divers, going down below a certain number of feet--I don't know exactly how far it is--get a sense of weightlessness, and at the same time this deprives them of every sense of responsibility. They become alarmingly happy, and they have been known to simply take off their masks and offer them to a fish. And of course they then drown. So if you skin dive, you have to keep your eye on the time. You have to have a water watch or a friend who's got a string attached to you. If you go down that far, and at a certain specific time you know you have got to get back, however happy you feel, and however much inclined you feel to say 'Survival? Survival? Whatever the hell's the point of that?' And this is happening to the men who go out into space. They increasingly find that they have to have automatic controls to bring them back. Quite aside that they can't change in any way from the spaceship, because once you become weightless... Now isn't that interesting?

Can you become weightless here? I said a little while ago that the person who really accepts transience begins to feel weightless. When Suzuki was asked what was it like to have experienced satori, enlightenment, he said it's just like ordinary everyday experience, but about two inches off the ground. Juan-Za[?], the Taoist, once said 'It is easy enough to stand still, the difficulty is to walk without touching the ground.' Now why do you feel so heavy? It isn't just a matter of gravitation and weight. It is that you feel that you are carrying your body around. So there is a koan in Zen Buddhism, 'Who is it that carries this corpse around?'

Common speech expresses this all of the time: 'life is a drag.' 'I feel like I'm just dragging myself around.' 'My body is a burden to me.' To whom? To whom? That's the question. When there is no body left for whom the body can be a burden, then the body isn't a burden. But so long as you fight it, it is.

So then, when there is no body left to resist the thing that we call change, which is simply another word for 'life,' and when we dispel the illusion that we think our thoughts, instead of being just a stream of thoughts, and that we feel our feelings, instead of being just feelings--it's like saying, you know, 'To feel the feelings' is a redundant expression. It's like saying 'Actually, I hear sounds,' for there ARE no sounds which are not heard. Hearing is sound. Seeing is sight. You don't see sights. Sight-seeing is a ridiculous word! You could say just either 'sighting,' or 'seeing,' one or the other, but SIGHT-seeing is nonsense!

So we keep doubling our words, and this doubling--hearing sounds, seeing sights--is comparable to oscillation in an electrical system where there's too much feedback. Where, you remember, in the old-fashioned telephone, where the receiver was separate from the mouthpiece, the transmitter. If you wanted to annoy someone who was abusing you on the telephone, you could make them listen to themselves by putting the receiver to the mouthpiece. But it actually didn't have that effect; it set up oscillation. It started a howl that would be very, very hard on the ears. Same way if you turn a television camera at the monitor--that is to say, the television set in the studio, the whole thing will start to jiggle. The visual picture will be of oscillation. And the same thing happens here. When you get to think that you think your thoughts, the you standing aside the thoughts has the same sort of consequence as seeing double, and then you think 'Can I observe the thinker thinking the thoughts?' Or, 'I am worried, and I ought not to worry, but because I can't stop worrying, I'm worried that I worry.' And you see where that could lead to. It leads to exactly the same situation that happens in the telephone, and that is what we call anxiety, trembling.

But his discipline that we're talking about of Nagarjuna's abolishes anxiety because you discover that no amount of anxiety makes any difference to anything that's going to happen. In other words, from the first standpoint, the worst is going to happen: we're all going to die. And don't just put it off in the back of your mind and say 'I'll consider that later.' It's the most important thing to consider NOW, because it is the mercy of nature, because it's going to enable you to let go and not defend yourself all the time, waste all energies in self-defense.

So this doctrine of the void is really the basis of the whole Mahayana movement in Buddhism. It's marvelous. The void is, of course, in Buddhist imagery, symbolized by a mirror, because a mirror has no color and yet reflects all colors. When this man I talked of, Hui-Neng, said that you shouldn't just try to cultivate a blank mind, what he said was this: the void, sunyata, is like space. Now, space contains everything--the mountains, the oceans, the stars, the good people and the bad people, the plants, the animals, everything. The mind in us--the true mind--is like that. You will find that when Buddhists use the word 'mind'--they've several words for 'mind,' but I'm not going into the technicality at the moment-- they mean space. See, space is your mind. It's very difficult for us to see that because we think we're IN space, and look out at it. There are various kinds of space. There's visual space--distance-- there is audible space--silence--there is temporal space--as

we say, between times--there is musical space--so-called distance between intervals, or distance between tones, rather; quite a different kind of space than temporal or visual space. There's tangible space. But all these spaces, you see, are the mind. They're the dimensions of consciousness.

And so, this great space, which every one of us apprehends from a slightly different point of view, in which the universe moves, this is the mind. So it's represented by a mirror, because although the mirror has no color, it is for that reason able to receive all the different colors. Meister Eckhardt[?] said 'In order to see color, my eye has to be free from color.' So in the same way, in order not only to see, but also to hear, to think, to feel, you have to have an empty head. And the reason why you are not aware of your brain cells--you're only aware of your brain cells if you get a tumor or something in the brain, when it gets sick--but in the ordinary way, you are totally unconscious of your brain cells; they're void. And for that reason you see everything else.

So that's the central principle of the Mahayana, and it works in such a way, you see, that it releases people from the notion that Buddhism is clinging to the void. This was very important when Buddhism went into China. The Chinese really dug this, because Chinese are a very practical people, and when they found these Hindu Buddhist monks trying to empty their minds and to sit perfectly still and not to engage in any family activities--they were celibates--Chinese thought they were crazy. Why do that? And so the Chinese reformed Buddhism, and they allowed Buddhist priests to marry. In fact, what they especially enjoyed was a sutra that came from India in which a layman was a wealthy merchant called Vimalakirti outargued all the other disciples of buddha. And of course, you know these dialectic arguments are very, very intense things. If you win the argument, everybody else has to be your disciple. So Vimalakirti the layman won the debate, even with Manjustri[?], who is the bodhisattva of supreme wisdom. They all had a contest to define the void, and all of them gave their definitions. Finally Manjustri gave his, and Vimalakirti was asked for his definition, and he said nothing, and so he won the whole argument. 'The thunderous silence.'

So Chinese and Japanese Buddhism is very strongly influenced by that trend that the void and form are the same. This is a very favorite subject for Zen masters and people who like to write. The void precisely is form. And they do this with great flourishes of calligraphy on the big sheets of paper. I'll show you some; I've got some for the seminar after next. But you see, this is not a denial of the world; it's not a putdown idea. To say that this world is diaphanous as, to use Shakespeare's phrase, an insubstantial pageant, is really to get into the heart of its glory.

[Alan Watts at deoxy.org](http://deoxy.org)

# Lecture On Zen

by Alan Watts

Once upon a time, there was a Zen student who quoted an old Buddhist poem to his teacher, which says:

The voices of torrents are from one great tongue, the lions of the hills are the pure body of Buddha. 'Isn't that right?' he said to the teacher. 'It is,' said the teacher, 'but it's a pity to say so.'

It would be, of course, much better, if this occasion were celebrated with no talk at all, and if I addressed you in the manner of the ancient teachers of Zen, I should hit the microphone with my fan and leave. But I somehow have the feeling that since you have contributed to the support of the Zen Center, in expectation of learning something, a few words should be said, even though I warn you, that by explaining these things to you, I shall subject you to a very serious hoax.

Because if I allow you to leave here this evening, under the impression that you understand something about Zen, you will have missed the point entirely. Because Zen is a way of life, a state of being, that is not possible to embrace in any concept whatsoever, so that any concepts, any ideas, any words that I shall put across to you this evening will have as their object, showing you the limitations of words and of thinking.

Now then, if one must try to say something about what Zen is, and I want to do this by way of introduction, I must make it emphatic that Zen, in its essence, is not a doctrine. There's nothing you're supposed to believe in. It's not a philosophy in our sense, that is to say a set of ideas, an intellectual net in which one tries to catch the fish of reality. Actually, the fish of reality is more like water--it always slips through the net. And in water you know when you get into it there's nothing to hang on to. All this universe is like water; it is fluid, it is transient, it is changing. And when you're thrown into the water after being accustomed to living on the dry land, you're not used to the idea of swimming. You try to stand on the water, you try to catch hold of it, and as a result you drown. The only way to survive in the water, and this refers particularly to the waters of modern philosophical confusion, where God is dead, metaphysical propositions are meaningless, and there's really nothing to hang on to, because we're all just falling apart. And the only thing to do under those circumstances is to learn how to swim. And to swim, you relax, you let go, you give yourself to the water, and you have to know how to breathe in the right way. And then you find that the water holds you up; indeed, in a certain way you become the water. And so in the same way, one might say if one attempted to--again I say misleadingly--to put Zen into any sort of concept, it simply comes down to this:

That in this universe, there is one great energy, and we have no name for it. People have tried various names for it, like God, like \*Brahmin, like Tao, but in the West, the word God has got so many funny associations attached to it that most of us are bored with it. When people say 'God, the father almighty,' most people feel funny inside. So we like to hear new words, we like to hear about Tao, about Brahmin, about Shinto, and \_\_\_-\_\_\_, and such

strange names from the far East because they don't carry the same associations of mawkish sanctimony and funny meanings from the past. And actually, some of these words that the Buddhists use for the basic energy of the world really don't mean anything at all. The word \_tathata\_, which is translated from the Sanskrit as 'suchness' or 'thusness' or something like that, really means something more like 'dadada,' based on the word \_tat\_, which in Sanskrit means 'that,' and so in Sanskrit it is said \_tat lum asi\_, 'that thou art,' or in modern America, 'you're it.' But 'da, da'--that's the first sound a baby makes when it comes into the world, because the baby looks around and says 'da, da, da, da' and fathers flatter themselves and think it's saying 'DaDa,' which means 'Daddy,' but according to Buddhist philosophy, all this universe is one 'dadada.' That means 'ten thousand functions, ten thousand things, one suchness,' and we're all one suchness. And that means that suchness comes and goes like anything else because this whole world is an on-and-off system. As the Chinese say, it's the \_yang\_ and the \_yin\_, and therefore it consists of 'now you see it, now you don't, here you are, here you aren't, here you are,' because that the nature of energy, to be like waves, and waves have crests and troughs, only we, being under a kind of sleepiness or illusion, imagine that the trough is going to overcome the wave or the crest, the \_yin\_, or the dark principle, is going to overcome the \_yang\_, or the light principle, and that 'off' is going to finally triumph over 'on.' And we, shall I say, bug ourselves by indulging in that illusion. 'Hey, supposing darkness did win out, wouldn't that be terrible!' And so we're constantly trembling and thinking that it may, because after all, isn't it odd that anything exists? It's most peculiar, it requires effort, it requires energy, and it would have been so much easier for there to have been nothing at all. Therefore, we think 'well, since being, since the 'is' side of things is so much effort' you always give up after a while and you sink back into death. But death is just the other face of energy, and it's the rest, the not being anything around, that produces something around, just in the same way that you can't have 'solid' without 'space,' or 'space' without 'solid.' When you wake up to this, and realize that the more it changes the more it's the same thing, as the French say, that you are really a train of this one energy, and there is nothing else but that that is you, but that for you to be always you would be an insufferable bore, and therefore it is arranged that you stop being you after a while and then come back as someone else altogether, and so when you find that out, you become full energy and delight. As Blake said, 'Energy is eternal delight.' And you suddenly see through the whole sham thing. You realize you're That--we won't put a name on it-- you're That, and you can't be anything else. So you are relieved of fundamental terror. That doesn't mean that you're always going to be a great hero, that you won't jump when you hear a bang, that you won't worry occasionally, that you won't lose your temper. It means, though, that fundamentally deep, deep, deep down within you, you will be able to be human, not a stone Buddha--you know in Zen there is a difference made between a living Buddha and a stone Buddha. If you go up to a stone Buddha and you hit him hard on the head, nothing happens. You break your fist or your stick. But if you hit a living Buddha, he may say 'ouch,' and he may feel pain, because if he didn't feel something, he wouldn't be a human being. Buddhas are human, they are not devas, they are not gods. They are enlightened men and women. But the point is that they are not afraid to be human, they are not afraid to let themselves participate in the pains, difficulties and struggles that naturally go with human existence. The only difference is--and it's almost an undetectable difference--it takes one to know one. As a Zen poem says, 'when two Zen masters meet each other on the street, they need no introduction. When fiends meet, they recognize one another instantly.' So a person who is a

real cool Zen understands that, does not go around 'Oh, I understand Zen, I have satori, I have this attainment, I have that attainment, I have the other attainment,' because if he said that, he wouldn't understand the first thing about it.

So it is Zen that, if I may put it metaphorically, \*Jon-Jo said 'the perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing, it refuses nothing. It receives but does not keep.' And another poem says of wild geese flying over a lake, 'The wild geese do not intend to cast their reflection, and the water has no mind to retain their image.' In other words this is to be--to put it very strictly into our modern idiom--this is to live without hang-ups, the word 'hang-up' being an almost exact translation of the Japanese bono and the Sanskrit klesa, ordinarily translated 'worldly attachment,' though that sounds a little bit--you know what I mean--it sounds pious, and in Zen, things that sound pious are said to stink of Zen, but to have no hang-ups, that is to say, to be able to drift like a cloud and flow like water, seeing that all life is a magnificent illusion, a plane of energy, and that there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Fundamentally. You will be afraid on the surface. You will be afraid of putting your hand in the fire. You will be afraid of getting sick, etc. But you will not be afraid of fear. Fear will pass over your mind like a black cloud will be reflected in the mirror. But of course, the mirror isn't quite the right illustration; space would be better. Like a black cloud flows through space without leaving any track. Like the stars don't leave trails behind them. And so that fundamental--it is called 'the void' in Buddhism; it doesn't mean 'void' in the sense that it's void in the ordinary sense of emptiness. It means void in that is the most real thing there is, but nobody can conceive it. It's rather the same situation that you get between the speaker, in a radio and all the various sounds which it produces. On the speaker you hear human voices, you hear every kind of musical instrument, honking of horns, the sounds of traffic, the explosions of guns, and yet all that tremendous variety of sounds are the vibrations of one diaphragm, but it never says so. The announcer doesn't come on first thing in the morning and say 'Ladies and gentlemen, all the sounds that you will hear subsequently during the day will be the vibration of this diaphragm; don't take them for real.' And the radio never mentions its own construction, you see? And in exactly the same way, you are never able, really, to examine, to make an object of your own mind, just as you can't look directly into your own eyes or bite your own teeth, because you ARE that, and if you try to find it, and make it something to possess, why that's a great lack of confidence. That shows that you don't really know your 'it'. And if you're 'it,' you don't need to make anything of it. There's nothing to look for. But the test is, are you still looking? Do you know that? I mean, not as kind of knowledge you possess, not something you've learned in school like you've got a degree, and 'you know, I've mastered the contents of these books and remembered it.' In this knowledge, there's nothing to be remembered; nothing to be formulated. You know it best when you say 'I don't know it.' Because that means, 'I'm not holding on to it, I'm not trying to cling to it' in the form of a concept, because there's absolutely no necessity to do so. That would be, in Zen language, putting legs on a snake or a beard on a eunuch, or as we would say, gilding the lily.

Now you say, 'Well, that sounds pretty easy. You mean to say all we have to do is relax? We don't have to go around chasing anything anymore? We abandon religion, we abandon meditations, we abandon this, that, and the other, and just live it up anyhow? Just go on.' You know, like a father says to his child who keeps asking 'Why? Why, Why, Why, Why,

Why? Why did God make the universe? Who made God? Why are the trees green?' and so on and so forth, and father says finally, 'Oh, shut up and eat your bun.' It isn't quite like that, because, you see, the thing is this:

All those people who try to realize Zen by doing nothing about it are still trying desperately to find it, and they're on the wrong track. There is another Zen poem which says, 'You cannot attain it by thinking, you cannot grasp it by not thinking.' Or you could say, you cannot catch hold of the meaning of Zen by doing something about it, but equally, you cannot see into its meaning by doing nothing about it, because both are, in their different ways, attempts to move from where you are now, here, to somewhere else, and the point is that we come to an understanding of this, what I call suchness, only through being completely here. And no means are necessary to be completely here. Neither active means on the one hand, nor passive means on the other. Because in both ways, you are trying to move away from the immediate now. But you see, it's difficult to understand language like that. And to understand what all that is about, there is really one absolutely necessary prerequisite, and this is to stop thinking. Now, I am not saying this in the spirit of being an anti-intellectual, because I think a lot, talk a lot, write a lot of books, and am a sort of half-baked scholar. But you know, if you talk all the time, you will never hear what anybody else has to say, and therefore, all you'll have to talk about is your own conversation. The same is true for people who think all the time. That means, when I use the word 'think,' talking to yourself, subvocal conversation, the constant chit-chat of symbols and images and talk and words inside your skull. Now, if you do that all the time, you'll find that you've nothing to think about except thinking, and just as you have to stop talking to hear what I have to say, you have to stop thinking to find out what life is about. And the moment you stop thinking, you come into immediate contact with what Korzybski called, so delightfully, 'the unspeakable world,' that is to say, the nonverbal world. Some people would call it the physical world, but these words 'physical,' 'nonverbal,' are all conceptual, not a concept either, it's (bangs stick). So when you are awake to that world, you suddenly find that all the so-called differences between self and other, life and death, pleasure and pain, are all conceptual, and they're not there. They don't exist at all in that world which is (bangs stick). In other words, if I hit you hard enough, 'ouch' doesn't hurt, if you're in a state of what is called no-thought. There is a certain experience, you see, but you don't call it 'hurt.' It's like when you were small children, they banged you about, and you cried, and they said 'Don't cry' because they wanted to make you hurt and not cry at the same time. People are rather curious about the things they do like that. But you see, they really wanted you to cry, the same way if you threw up one day. It's very good to throw up if you've eaten something that isn't good for you, but your mother said 'Eugh!' and made you repress it and feel that throwing up wasn't a good thing to do. Because then when you saw people die, and everybody around you started weeping and making a fuss, and then you learned from that that dying was terrible. When somebody got sick, everybody else got anxious, and you learned that getting sick was something awful. You learned it from a concept.

So the reason why there is in the practice of Zen, what we did before this lecture began, to practice Za-zen, sitting Zen. Incidentally, there are three other kinds of Zen besides Za-zen. Standing Zen, walking Zen, and lying Zen. In Buddhism, they speak of the three dignities of man. Walking, standing, sitting, and lying. And they say when you sit, just sit. When you

walk, just walk. But whatever you do, don't wobble. In fact, of course, you can wobble, if you really wobble well. When the old master \*Hiakajo was asked 'What is Zen?' he said 'When hungry, eat, when tired, sleep,' and they said, 'Well isn't that what everybody does? Aren't you just like ordinary people?' 'Oh no,' he said, 'they don't do anything of the kind. When they're hungry, they don't just eat, they think of all sorts of things. When they're tired, they don't just sleep, but dream all sorts of dreams.' I know the Jungians won't like that, but there comes a time when you just dream yourself out, and no more dreams. You sleep deeply and breathe from your heels. Now, therefore, Za-zen, or sitting Zen, is a very, very good thing in the Western world. We have been running around far too much. It's all right; we've been active, and our action has achieved a lot of good things. But as Aristotle pointed out long ago--and this is one of the good things about Aristotle. He said 'the goal of action is contemplation.' In other words, busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, but what's it all about? Especially when people are busy because they think they're GOING somewhere, that they're going to get something and attain something. There's quite a good deal of point to action if you know you're not going anywhere. If you act like you dance, or like you sing or play music, then you're really not going anywhere, you're just doing pure action, but if you act with a thought in mind that as a result of action you are eventually going to arrive at someplace where everything will be alright. Then you are on a squirrel cage, hopelessly condemned to what the Buddhists call samsara, the round, or rat-race of birth and death, because you think you're going to go somewhere. You're already there. And it is only a person who has discovered that he is already there who is capable of action, because he doesn't act frantically with the thought that he's going to get somewhere. He acts like he can go into walking meditation at that point, you see, where we walk not because we are in a great, great hurry to get to a destination, but because the walking itself is great. The walking itself is the meditation. And when you watch Zen monks walk, it's very fascinating. They have a different kind of walk from everybody else in Japan. Most Japanese shuffle along, or if they wear Western clothes, they race and hurry like we do. Zen monks have a peculiar swing when they walk, and you have the feeling they walk rather the same way as a cat. There's something about it that isn't hesitant; they're going along all right, they're not sort of vagueing around, but they're walking just to walk. And that's walking meditation. But the point is that one cannot act creatively, except on the basis of stillness. Of having a mind that is capable from time to time of stopping thinking. And so this practice of sitting may seem very difficult at first, because if you sit in the Buddhist way, it makes your legs ache. Most Westerners start to fidget; they find it very boring to sit for a long time, but the reason they find it boring is that they're still thinking. If you weren't thinking, you wouldn't notice the passage of time, and as a matter of fact, far from being boring, the world when looked at without chatter becomes amazingly interesting. The most ordinary sights and sounds and smells, the texture of shadows on the floor in front of you. All these things, without being named, and saying 'that's a shadow, that's red, that's brown, that's somebody's foot.' When you don't name things anymore, you start seeing them. Because say when a person says 'I see a leaf,' immediately, one thinks of a spearhead-shaped thing outlined in black and filled in with flat green. No leaf looks like that. No leaves--leaves are not green. That's why Lao-Tzu said 'the five colors make a man blind, the five tones make a man deaf,' because if you can only see five colors, you're blind, and if you can only hear five tones in music, you're deaf. You see, if you force sound into five tones, you force color into five colors, you're blind and deaf. The world of color is infinite, as is the world of sound. And it is only

by stopping fixing conceptions on the world of color and the world of sound that you really begin to hear it and see it.

So this, should I be so bold as to use the word 'discipline,' of meditation or Za-zen lies behind the extraordinary capacity of Zen people to develop such great arts as the gardens, the tea ceremony, the calligraphy, and the grand painting of the Sum Dynasty, and of the Japanese Sumi tradition. And it was because, especially in tea ceremony, which means literally 'cha-no-yu' in Japanese, meaning 'hot water of tea,' they found in the very simplest of things in everyday life, magic. In the words of the poet \*Hokoji, 'marvelous power and supernatural activity, drawing water, carrying wood.' And you know how it is sometimes when you say a word and make the word meaningless, you take the word 'yes'--yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. It becomes funny. That's why they use the word 'mu' in Zen training, which means 'no.' Mu. And you get this going for a long time, and the word ceases to mean anything, and it becomes magical. Now, what you have to realize in the further continuence of Za-zen, that as you-- Well, let me say first in a preliminary way, the easiest way to stop thinking is first of all to think about something that doesn't have any meaning. That's my point in talking about 'mu' or 'yes,' or counting your breath, or listening to a sound that has no meaning, because that stops you thinking, and you become fascinated in the sound. Then as you get on and you just--the sound only--there comes a point when the sound is taken away, and you're wide open. Now at that point, there will be a kind of preliminary so-called satori, and you will think 'wowie, that's it!' You'll be so happy, you'll be walking on air. When Suzuki Daisetz was asked what was it like to have satori, he said 'well, it's like ordinary, everyday experience, except about two inches off the ground.' But there's another saying that the student who has obtained satori goes to hell as straight as an arrow. No satori around here, because anybody who has a spiritual experience, whether you get it through Za-zen, or through LSD, or anything, you know, that gives you that experience. If you hold on to it, say 'now I've got it,' it's gone out of the window, because the minute you grab the living thing, it's like catching a handful of water, the harder you clutch, the faster it squirts through your fingers. There's nothing to get hold of, because you don't NEED to get hold of anything. You had it from the beginning. Because you can see that, by various methods of meditation, but the trouble is that people come out of that an brag about it, say 'I've seen it.' Equally intolerable are the people who study Zen and come out and brag to their friends about how much their legs hurt, and how long they sat, and what an awful thing it was. They're sickening. Because the discipline side of this thing is not meant to be something awful. It's not done in a masochistic spirit, or a sadistic spirit: suffering builds character, therefore suffering is good for you. When I went to school in England, the basic premise of education was that suffering builds character, and therefore all senior boys were at liberty to bang about the junior ones with a perfectly clear conscience, because they were doing them a favor. It was good for them, it was building their character, and as a result of this attitude, the word 'discipline' has begun to stink. It's been stinking for a long time. But we need a kind of entirely new attitude towards this, because without that quiet, and that non- striving, a life becomes messy. When you let go, finally, because there's nothing to hold onto, you have to be awfully careful not to turn into loose yogurt. Let me give two opposite illustrations. When you ask most people to lie flat on the floor and relax, you find that they are at full attention, because they don't really believe that the floor will hold them up, and therefore they're holding themselves together; they're uptight. They're afraid that if they

don't do this, even though the floor is supporting them, they'll suddenly turn into a gelatinous mass and trickle away in all directions. Then there are other people who when you tell them to relax, they go like a limp rag. But you see, the human organism is a subtle combination of hardness and softness. Of flesh and bones. And the side of Zen which has to do with neither doing nor not doing, but knowing that you are It anyway, and you don't have to seek it, that's Zen-flesh. But the side in which you can come back into the world, with this attitude of not seeking, and knowing you're It, and not fall apart--that requires bones. And one of the most difficult things--this belongs to of course a generation we all know about that was running about some time ago--where they caught on to Zen, and they started anything-goes painting, they started anything-goes sculpture, they started anything-goes way of life. Now I think we're recovering from that today. At any rate, our painters are beginning once again to return to glory, to marvelous articulateness and vivid color. There's been nothing like it since the stained glass at Chartre(sp). That's a good sign. But it requires that there be in our daily use of freedom, and I'm not just talking about political freedom. I'm talking about the freedom which comes when you know that you're It, forever and ever and ever. And it'll be so nice when you die, because that'll be a change, but it'll come back some other way. When you know that, and you've seen through the whole mirage, then watch out, because there may still be in you some seeds of hostility, some seeds of pride, some seeds of wanting to put down other people, or wanting to just defy the normal arrangements of life.

So that is why, in the order of a Zen monastery, various duties are assigned. The novices have the light duties, and the more senior you get, the heavy duties. For example, the Roshi very often is the one who cleans out the \_benjo\_, the toilet. And everything is kept in order. There is a kind of beautiful, almost princely aestheticism, because by reason of that order being kept all of the time, the vast free energy which is contained in the system doesn't run amok. The understanding of Zen, the understanding of awakening, the understanding of-- Well, we'll call it mystical experiences, one of the most dangerous things in the world. And for a person who cannot contain it, it's like putting a million volts through your electric shaver. You blow your mind and it stays blown. Now, if you go off in that way, that is what would be called in Buddhism a pratyeka- buddha--'private buddha'. He is one who goes off into the transcendental world and is never seen again. And he's made a mistake from the standpoint of Buddhism, because from the standpoint of Buddhism, there is no fundamental difference between the transcendental world and this everyday world. The \_bodhisattva\_, you see, who doesn't go off into a nirvana and stay there forever and ever, but comes back and lives ordinary everyday life to help other beings to see through it, too, he doesn't come back because he feels he has some sort of solemn duty to help mankind and all that kind of pious cant. He comes back because he sees the two worlds are the same. He sees all other beings as buddhas. He sees them, to use a phrase of G.K. Chesterton's, 'but now a great thing in the street, seems any human nod, where move in strange democracies the million masks of god.' And it's fantastic to look at people and see that they really, deep down, are enlightened. They're It. They're faces of the divine. And they look at you, and they say 'oh no, but I'm not divine. I'm just ordinary little me.' You look at them in a funny way, and here you see the buddha nature looking out of their eyes, straight at you, and saying it's not, and saying it quite sincerely. And that's why, when you get up against a great guru, the Zen master, or whatever, he has a funny look in his eyes. When you say 'I have a problem, guru. I'm really mixed up, I don't understand,' he looks at you in this queer way, and you think 'oh

dear me, he's reading my most secret thoughts. He's seeing all the awful things I am, all my cowardice, all my shortcomings.' He isn't doing anything of the kind; he isn't even interested in such things. He's looking at, if I may use Hindu terminology, he's looking at Shiva, in you, saying 'my god, Shiva, won't you come off it?'

So then, you see, the \_bodhisattva\_, who is--I'm assuming quite a knowledge of Buddhism in this assembly--but the \_bodhisattva\_ as distinct from the pratyeka-buddha, bodhisattva doesn't go off into nirvana, he doesn't go off into permanent withdrawn ecstasy, he doesn't go off into a kind of catatonic \_samadhi\_. That's all right. There are people who can do that; that's their vocation. That's their specialty, just as a long thing is the long body of buddha, and a short thing is the short body of buddha. But if you really understand that Zen, that buddhist idea of enlightenment is not comprehended in the idea of the transcendental, neither is it comprehended in the idea of the ordinary. Not in terms with the infinite, not in terms with the finite. Not in terms of the eternal, not in terms of the temporal, because they're all concepts. So, let me say again, I am not talking about the ordering of ordinary everyday life in a reasonable and methodical way as being schoolteacherish, and saying 'if you were NICE people, that's what you would do.' For heaven's sake, don't be nice people. But the thing is, that unless you do have that basic framework of a certain kind of order, and a certain kind of discipline, the force of liberation will blow the world to pieces. It's too strong a current for the wire. So then, it's terribly important to see beyond ecstasy. Ecstasy here is the soft and lovable flesh, huggable and kissable, and that's very good. But beyond ecstasy are bones, what we call hard facts. Hard facts of everyday life, and incidentally, we shouldn't forget to mention the soft facts; there are many of them. But then the hard fact, it is what we mean, the world as seen in an ordinary, everyday state of consciousness. To find out that that is really no different from the world of supreme ecstasy, well, it's rather like this:

Let's suppose, as so often happens, you think of ecstasy as insight, as seeing light. There's a Zen poem which says

A sudden crash of thunder. The mind doors burst open,  
and there sits the ordinary old man.

See? There's a sudden vision. Satori! Breaking! Wowee! And the doors of the mind are blown apart, and there sits the ordinary old man. It's just little you, you know? Lightning flashes, sparks shower. In one blink of your eyes, you've missed seeing. Why? Because here is the light. The light, the light, the light, every mystic in the world has 'seen the light.' That brilliant, blazing energy, brighter than a thousand suns, it is locked up in everything. Now imagine this. Imagine you're seeing it. Like you see aureoles around buddhas. Like you see the beatific vision at the end of Dante's 'Paradiso.' Vivid, vivid light, so bright that it is like the clear light of the void in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. It's beyond light, it's so bright. And you watch it receding from you. And on the edges, like a great star, there becomes a rim of red. And beyond that, a rim of orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. You see this great mandala appearing this great sun, and beyond the violet, there's black. Black, like obsidian, not flat black, but transparent black, like lacquer. And again, blazing out of the black, as the \_yang\_ comes from the \_yin\_, more light. Going, going, going. And along with this light, there comes sound. There is a sound so tremendous with the white light that you

can't hear it, so piercing that it seems to annihilate the ears. But then along with the colors, the sound goes down the scale in harmonic intervals, down, down, down, down, until it gets to a deep thundering base which is so vibrant that it turns into something solid, and you begin to get the similar spectrum of textures. Now all this time, you've been watching a kind of thing radiating out. 'But,' it says, 'you know, this isn't all I can do,' and the rays start dancing like this, and the sound starts waving, too, as it comes out, and the textures start varying themselves, and they say, well, you've been looking at this this as I've been describing it so far in a flat dimension. Let's add a third dimension; it's going to come right at you now. And meanwhile, it says, we're not going to just do like this, we're going to do little curlicues. And it says, 'well, that's just the beginning!' Making squares and turns, and then suddenly you see in all the little details that become so intense, that all kinds of little subfigures are contained in what you originally thought were the main figures, and the sound starts going all different, amazing complexities if sound all over the place, and this thing's going, going, going, and you think you're going to go out of your mind, when suddenly it turns into... Why, us, sitting around here.

Thank you very much.

Scribbled down by Alan Seaver.

[Alan Watts at deoxy.org](http://deoxy.org)



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2

## SPADES

To the North are Diamonds, to the South Spades, to the East Hearts and to the West Clubs, running inwards to the centre from the two to the Ace. The first question was to decide the meaning of the four suits, and at once the four elements of Fire, Earth, Water and Air suggested themselves together with the four faculties of the human mind, Intuition, Sensation, Feeling and Intellect. But which belonged to which? It was at once obvious that Spades belonged to Earth and Hearts to Feeling. Sensation is the avenue whereby we receive our impressions of material things, and so this was accorded to Earth and Spades. Feeling is a passive, feminine faculty, not usually well developed in men; we talk about 'feminine intuition' but as a rule we generally mean feminine feeling - a certain sensitivity to emotional values, to psychological 'atmospheres' and feeling-situations where men are apt to be 'slow in the uptake.' It was thus decided to place Hearts and Feeling under the feminine element of Water - that passive substance that always yields but can never be defeated. Opposite Hearts we have Clubs, and it was not at once easy to decide whether Fire or Air should be called the opposite of Water. Fire and Water are hostile, but Air and Water are creative, for in the beginning 'the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,' and, 'except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' It was therefore decided to make the figure harmonious instead of hostile, regarding the four suits as compliments rather than opposites. Thus as Air complements Water being the active agent which shaped the passive substance into the forms of waves. Thought or Intellect, as Air, was put opposite Feeling, as Water. Feeling is passive but Intellect - a masculine quality - is active and often aggressive, and so belongs appropriately to clubs. Intuition and Fire remain to be classed with Diamonds, for intuition is the spiritual faculty which compliments Sensation, the sensual or material faculty. Fire is not hostile to Earth, but its lightness (in both senses) compliments the soil's darkness and heaviness. To Buddhist philosophers the diamond (vajra) is the symbol of spiritual consciousness because of its strength and luminous clarity. It has been said that 'a diamond is a piece of coal which has stuck to its job,' being that which results from intense fire working upon black carbon. Therefore the four suits are understood as follows:

**Diamonds (Fire & Intuition) - Spades (Earth & Sensation)**  
**Hearts (Water & Feeling) - Clubs (Air & Intellect)**

But what about the rest of the figure? We see that there is a progression of numbers and court cards from the extremity of each arm of the cross to the centre - four ways of approach to the Divinity as present represented by a question mark as He is unknown. Corresponding to the four faculties, the Hindus devised four kinds of yoga for awakening man's understanding of his union with Brahman, the Self of the Universe: karma yoga, the way of Action, Bhakti yoga, the way of Devotion, gnana yoga, the way of Intellect, and raja yoga, the way of developing the higher faculties of Intuition. But it will be seen that in our figure each path is of a like pattern, running:

**2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Knave Queen King Ace**

The Progression shows, among other things, each stage of man's path to supreme Enlightenment from the child and the primitive to the sage. From 2 to 10 the path seems to be going backwards, as will shortly be apparent, because it often seems that civilized man is further from spirituality than the child and the primitive. Actually this is not true, for in the parable of the Prodigal Son it is the prodigal for whom the fatted calf is slain and not the faithful son, for one has to be divided from union with the Father before one can truly appreciate it. To adapt a line of Kipling's, 'He does not know Union who only Union knows.'

We begin with the 2, for with every one of the four faculties the first thing of which we are aware, the very foundation of our experience, is the difference between that which we call our self and that which is not the self, between the thing which we call 'I' and the outer universe. This is the first of all the pairs of opposites of which

life is composed, the subjective and the objective. But these two things do not exist in our consciousness without a third factor, namely the relationship between them, which is shown by the 3. That relationship may be attraction or repulsion, of love or fear, or of balance between the two which is called indifference. Without trinity, duality has no more meaning than man and woman without child, and unless there is a relationship between ourselves and the universe we can have no consciousness of our existence - indeed, we could not even exist. To some things in the universe we react with love or attraction, and to others with fear or repulsion, and this is as natural as that fire should make us warm and ice make us cold.

But here the difficulties begin, because man does not stop with that basic reaction to life. It is not just that he likes some things and dislikes others; he has also decided feelings about the state of liking and disliking, and so from 3 we proceed to 4. This stage marks the beginning of self-consciousness and civilization, for man becomes attached to loving or liking and wishes to have about him only those things in the universe which arouse attraction. At the same time he becomes afraid of fear because it makes him ashamed, being a menace to his pride and self-esteem. But this does not get rid of his fear; it only adds one fear on top of another. Thus as soon as man becomes self-conscious and self-esteeming and fully aware of his reactions to things, he starts trying to interfere with the processes of his soul. And this is called civilization. He is not content to be the primitive who just loves and fears things without shame, thinking no more about it. He must now control his reactions and shape them in accordance with some preconceived pattern of character development. Fear must not exist in his vocabulary and so-called 'love' must be cultivated under such names as ambition and happiness. But this interference with the natural processes of the soul (psychologists call it repression) removes us further and further from basic realities, precipitating us into a sort of tail chasing procedure. Like dogs trying to catch their tails, cats running after their own shadows and lunatics trying to lift themselves up by their own belts, men try to make themselves what they think they ought to be - a form of self-deception which receives rude shocks when the surface of civilization is removed. This regression from basic realities is represented by the cards from 4 to 10, the latter being the point where man has completely forgotten his union with life, where his self-consciousness has reached the stage of utter isolation and where he is hopelessly bewildered by what the Chinese call 'the ten thousand things' - or the manifold and apparently separate and chaotic objects and events of the universe.

This is the moment of crisis in human evolution. Man becomes acutely aware of his unhappiness and insufficiency, and realises, appropriately enough, that he is a Knave. What is he to do about it? Look at the next card, the Queen - the feminine, passive principle - and if you look carefully at the card you will see that each of the four Queens holds an open flower. The Knaves hold swords, spears and daggers, emblems of their hostility to the life from which they have so estranged themselves, but the flower which is open to sun and rain alike is the symbol of acceptance. The Knave has estranged himself from life by his pride and false morality, by fighting the natural processes of the soul and trying to make out that he is greater than he is. ('Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature!') But the Queen accepts those processes, both the love and the fear and all the other opposites by which those feelings are aroused - life and death, pleasure and pain, good and evil. She knows that man must accept all the aspects of life if he is to be happy, and that if he would see the god in himself he must not deny the demon. 'Demon' runs the Hermetic aphorism, 'est deus inversus' - the demon is a god upside-down. Therefore the Queen stands for that acceptance and spiritual love which, like His sun, God 'maketh to shine upon both the just and the unjust.' As yet, however, this acceptance is incomplete, for the Queen is only the female or passive aspect of acceptance. The complete union and harmony with life which is the goal of all these four paths is not simply a quietistic state of spiritual *laissez-faire* in which man just allows life to live him. That is, indeed, a step on the way, but the very idea of allowing life to live you, of submitting to your destiny, to the will of God, or whatever it may be called, still implies a distinction between yourself and life, nature or God.

When this distinction is overcome there is no longer any question of yourself being ruled by life and destiny or of yourself ruling your life and destiny; the problem of fate or free will then disappears, for the ruler and the ruled are united, and you do not know whether you are living life or whether life is living you. It is as if two dancers were dancing together in such perfect accord that the lead of one and the response of the other were one and the same movement, as if action and passivity became a single act. In our figure this is symbolized by the King. In their hands the Kings hold swords and axes like the Knaves; in fact, the Kings are Knaves but with this difference: that the Knaves are compelled to be Knaves and cannot help themselves, whereas the Kings are free to be Knaves. This is the difference between the man who is moral (who fights the dark side of life) because he fears evil, and the man who is moral because he knows he is perfectly free to be immoral. In the stage of the Queen we discover our freedom to be moral instead of our compulsion. For when you feel that you are free to be as evil as

you like you will find the idea rather tedious.

Thus in the Queen and the King we have the free, royal pair, symbols of spiritual liberty - liberty to love and to fear, to fight and the yield, to resist and to accept and - yes - to be free and to be compelled, for freedom is not absolutely free unless it is also free to be bound! Therefore the combination of these two is represented in the Ace, symbol of the union between oneself and life which arises from this complete acceptance of life. Here the four paths meet, but an uncomfortable empty space is left in the middle of the cross and something seems to be needed to tie the whole figure together - shall we say to make it holy? We have reduced the many, represented by the 2, to the One, represented by the Ace, but the Buddhist problem asks, 'When the many are reduced to the One, to what shall the One be reduced?' For as the figure stands it would seem that there is a difference between the many and the One, that in going along the path from the 2 to the Ace you have actually acquired something which you did not have before. Spirituality, however, is not acquired; it is only realized, because union with life is something we have all the time even though we do not know it. Our seeming loss of union in the civilized, self-conscious world is only apparent, only something which occurs in Time but not in Eternity. From the standpoint of Eternity, every stage in the path is both beginning and end and middle; there is neither coming nor going, gain nor loss, ignorance nor enlightenment.

What shall we put in the middle? I think we have forgotten a card - the one we usually leave in the box. What about the Joker?

A profane symbol? Not at all. For the joke about the whole thing is that, wherever we stand on the paths, we are really at the Goal - only we do not know it. It is like looking all over the house for your keys only to find that you are carrying them in your hand, whereat you sit down and laugh at yourself.

But the Joker makes an appropriate centre for another reason: in games he is allowed to represent any other card in the pack. So also in this figure he is the 2 and the Ace and all that lies in between - Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending . . . the first and the last.

Indeed, as Chesterton said, there is a closer connection between 'cosmic' and 'comic' than the mere similarity of the words!

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