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Out of Your Mind: Tricksters, Interdependence, and the Cosmic Game of Hide and Seek (English Edition)

by Alan Watts

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27 Highlights

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 193

If there was a big bang at the beginning of time, you are not something that is the result of that explosion at the end of the process. You are the process.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 213

You and I are as continuous with the physical universe as a wave is continuous with the ocean. The ocean waves, the universe peoples.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 264

If there is any such thing as intelligence or love or beauty, you find it in other people. Those things exist in human beings, and if they exist in us, it means that intelligence and love and beauty are symptomatic of the scheme of things. Apples are symptomatic of apple trees; roses are symptomatic of rose bushes; and we are symptomatic of the universe.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 306

What is this universe? Is it a monarchy? A republic? A mechanism or an organism? If the universe is some kind of mechanism, it follows that it operates by itself (the fully automatic model) or that it's controlled by some great mechanic (the ceramic model). But if the universe is an organism, it governs itself, since an organism is a thing that runs itself. In your body, there's no boss. You can argue that the brain is a gadget evolved by the stomach for the purposes of acquiring food. Or you can argue that the stomach is a device evolved by the brain to feed it and keep it alive. Whose game is it—the brain's or the stomach's?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 383

But if you awaken from the illusion and understand that black implies white, self implies other, life implies death (or, rather, death implies life), you can begin to feel yourself. You can feel that you're not just a stranger in the world, that you're not something here on probation, that you're not fundamentally some sort of fluke, and you can begin to feel your own existence as absolutely fundamental. What you are basically—deep, deep down and far, far in—is simply the fabric and structure of existence itself.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 456

In Zen, they say that when you attain satori, or enlightenment, the only thing left to do is have a good laugh. But Zen masters—every kind of master, for that matter—put up the barrier and run you through the mill, because they're simply playing your own game. Another Zen saying has it that whoever wants to study Zen should be beaten with a stick, because he or she was stupid enough to pretend that they had a problem in the first place. But you don't have a problem. You are the problem. You put yourself in this situation.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 512

Conscious attention is a designed function of the brain to scan the environment for trouble. And if you identify yourself as the troubleshooter, you define yourself as living in a perpetual state of anxiety.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 565

Almost all spiritual disciplines—meditations, prayers, and so on—are ways of persisting in folly. They're methods of resolutely and consistently doing what you're already doing.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 660

So a thing happens of itself. You don't have to tell a fart it ought to happen—that puts it in a bind. It's just like telling a child to come and play its game in front of a crowded audience of relatives on Thanksgiving. It absolutely bugs children when you do that. This is the problem for every artist—dancers, musicians, painters, and so on—because artists make their living by playing. And playing on demand, particularly in public at such and such a time, is not an easy thing to learn. My friend Saburo Hasegawa refers to this contrivance as a “controlled accident.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 668

But if we can maintain a sense of being Paul Jones while at the same time understanding we are the whole works, then that's a very marvelous and agreeable arrangement. If you can carry these two perspectives at once, you will experience a most remarkable harmoniousness. It will bring your life a great sense of joy and exuberance, because you know that all the serious predicaments of life are a game.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1081

the forest floor. They mold and rot and supply humus

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1160

We must reverse our thinking and see that the past always flows back from the present—now is the creative point of life. For example, when you forgive someone, you change the meaning of the past. Or when you're reading a sentence in German or Latin where the verb awaits you at the very end, it's only then that you find out what the sentence means. The present is always changing the past.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1712

This illusion of beating the game is dissipated by the koan. They say that working on a koan is like a mosquito biting an iron bull—it's the nature of a mosquito to bite, but it's the nature of an iron bull to remain unbiten.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1726

So this method of Zen training only works for someone who will be satisfied by nothing else in the world—they just have to do it. And that's why this method isn't suitable for the modern age, and why most Japanese temples are relatively empty. In fact, most temples that have remained open have become old and set in their ways—they're very fixed and traditional, and a lot of what they do is meaningless. Zen is certainly not going to last in that form. It's even common—and has been since the time of Hakuin—for masters to expect students to answer koans in a prescribed way

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1887

The difference between seriousness and sincerity is that seriousness is someone speaking in the context of the possibility of tragedy. Things might go absolutely wrong, so I put on a serious expression like a soldier on parade or someone in court or church. Everything is a matter of life and death. Which brings up the fundamental question: "Is God serious?" And—obviously—the answer is "No." And so the supreme self is quite useless. It doesn't matter, because it transcends all values of what is better or worse, what is up or down, what is good or bad. It weaves the world so that good and bad play together like the black and white pieces in a game of chess.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1945

In chess, if you play an opponent who can always defeat you, you'll soon stop playing with them, just as you'll stop playing with someone you can beat all of the time. But if there remains a certain uncertainty of outcome, and you win some of the time, then it's a good game.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2102

There's a famous Zen story of a monk sitting in meditation. The master comes along and asks, "What are you doing?" And the monk replies, "Oh, I'm meditating so I can become a Buddha." Well, the master sits down nearby, picks up a brick, and starts rubbing it. And the monk asks, "What are you doing?" The master says, "Oh, I'm rubbing this brick to make it into a mirror." And the monk says, "No amount of rubbing a brick can turn it into a mirror." To which the master replies, "And no amount of zazen will turn you into a Buddha." They don't like this story very much in modern-day Japan.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2128

To understand yoga, you should read Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. There are so many translations, and I'm not sure which is the best.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2189

How do you get people to trust life? You have to trick them. They won't jump into the water, so you have to throw them in. And if they're very unwilling to be thrown in, they're going to take diving lessons or read books about diving or do preliminary exercises or stand at the edge of the diving board and inquire which is the right posture until somebody comes up from behind and kicks them in the butt to get them in the water.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2216

It was the only way to cross castes, and through literacy, our caste system eventually began to break down, because we got the idea of choosing one's own vocation—that is, not simply following what one's parents did.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2232

Rugged individualism always leads to conformism. People get scared, they herd together, they wear the same clothes, and the clothes just get duller and drabber.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2243

That's why wise kings keep court fools—the fool reminds the king that he's going to die, that he's mortal. The fool lets the king know that there are forces and domains way, way beyond that of the king's. But that's very difficult for a democracy to realize, because it's insecure. That's why in our present world, it's nearly impossible to abandon your nationality. As Henry David Thoreau put it, "Wherever you may seek solitude, men will ferret you out and compel you to belong to their desperate company of odd fellows."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2288

Now, the Buddha formulated his teachings to be very easy to remember—all Buddhist scriptures are full of mnemonic tricks. Things are numbered in ways that are easy to remember. So the Buddha proposed the Four Noble Truths: dukkha, trishna, nirvana, and marga. His main concern was the first one—dukkha—which means "suffering, pain, frustration, and chronic dis-ease." It's

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2363

If you say what it is that you see, you erect an image and an idol, and you misdirect people. So it's better to destroy people's beliefs than to give them beliefs. I know it hurts, but it's true. It's what cracks the eggshell and lets out the chick.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2377

It's all right to read the Dhammapada or the Diamond Sutra or the Lankavatara, but when you get mixed up with the larger Prajnaparamita and all those things, you're in deep water.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2381

“Just as a dog is not considered a good dog just for being a good barker, a man is not considered a good man just for being a good talker.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2557

If you say, “There is a God,” that’s a concept. If you say, “There is no God,” that’s also a concept. And so Nagarjuna emphasized the dialectic method of teaching Buddhism, specifically at the University of Nalanda, which was destroyed when the Muslims invaded India but which has been reestablished in modern times. The dialectic method is perfectly simple and can be done with an individual student and teacher or with a group—you’d be amazed at how effective it is when it involves precious little more than discussion. The teacher gradually elicits from participants their basic premises on life—what their fundamental assumptions are. What is right and wrong? What is the good life? Where do you take your stand? And the teacher finds this out for each student and then demolishes it. When you lose your fundamental beliefs, you lose your personal compass. And you get frightened and immediately look for something to depend on. And in this dialectic method, the teacher doesn’t offer any alternative suggestions, they just continue the process of examination: “Why do you think you have to have something to depend on?” Now, this is kept up over quite a period of
