

## Alan Watts

### ***The Human Game:***

“Now existence you see is something that is spontaneous, the Chinese word for nature (Tian ran), means that which happens of itself. Your hair grows by itself. Your heart beats by itself. You breathe pretty much by itself. Your glands secrete their essences pretty much by themselves. You don’t have voluntary control over these things, so we say it happens spontaneously. So when you go to sleep and you try to go to sleep, you interfere with the spontaneous process of going to sleep. Try to breathe real hard and you find you get balled up in your breathing.

So if you go to be human, you just have to trust yourself to have bowel movements, go to sleep, and digest your food; of course if something goes seriously wrong and you need a surgeon that’s another matter. But by and large, the healthy human being doesn’t right from the start of life need surgical interference. And he lets it happen by itself. And so with the whole picture that is fundamental, you have got to let go and let it happen. Because if you don’t, you’re going to be all clutched up. You’re going to be constantly trying to do what can happen healthily only if you don’t try. But we have a strange anxiety in us; that if we don’t interfere than it won’t happen. Now that’s the root of an enormous amount of trouble.

The basis of it all is this then. If we say you must survive, or I must survive, life is earnest and I’ve got to go on. Then your life is a drag and not a game. Now it’s my contention and my personal opinion (this is my basic metaphysical axiom, shall we put it that way) that existence, the physical universe, is basically playful. There is no necessity for it whatsoever. It isn’t going anywhere. That is to say it doesn’t have some destination that it ought to arrive at.

So then, in music though, one doesn’t make the end of the composition – the point of the composition. If that was so the best conductors would be those who played fastest. And there would be composers who wrote only finales. People would go to concerts just to hear one crashing chord, because that’s the end. Say when dancing, you don’t aim at a particular spot in the room – that’s the where you should arrive; the whole point of the dancing is the dance. But we don’t see that as something brought by our education into our everyday conduct. We’ve got a system of schooling which gives us a completely different impression.

It’s all graded and what we do is we put the child into the corridor of this grade system with a kind of – come on kiddie, kiddie, kiddie. And now you go to kindergarten and that a great thing because once you finish that you get into first grade. And then come on first grade leads to second grade, and so on. And then you

get out of grade school and you go to high school, and its revving up - the thing is coming. Then you've got to college, and then maybe grad school. And when you're through with graduate school you go out and join the world.

Then you get into some racket where you're selling insurance. And then you have that quota to make, and you're going to make that. And all the time the thing is coming, its coming; that thing, the great success you're working for. Then when you wake up one day when your about forty years old, you say 'my god, I've arrived.' I'm there! And you don't feel very different than what you've always feel. And there's a slight let down because you feel there is a hoax. And there was a hoax - a dreadful hoax. They have made you miss everything; by expectation. Look at the people who live to retire and put those savings away. And then when they're 65 they don't have any energy left. They are more or less impotent and they go and rot in an old people's senior citizens community; and because we've simply cheated ourselves the whole way down the line. Because we thought of life by analogy with a journey - with a pilgrimage. Which had a serious purpose at the end and the thing was to get to that end; success or whatever it is or maybe heaven after your dead. But we missed the point the whole way along. It was a musical thing and you were supposed to sing and to dance while the music was being played. But you had to do that thing, you didn't let it happen.

So in this way the human being sometimes becomes an organism for self-frustration. Man can be referred to as the time binder. That he's the animal peculiarly aware of the time sequence. And as a result of this is able to do some very remarkable things - he can predict. He studies what has happened in the past and says the chances of so and so of that happening again, and so he predicts. Well this is very useful to be able to predict, because that has survival value; but at the same time it creates anxiety. You paid for this increase survival ability involved in prediction by knowing that in the end you won't succeed. You're all going to fall apart, by one way or another. It might happen tomorrow, it might happen fifty years from now, but it all comes apart in the end. And people get worried about that, they get anxious. So what they gained on the round-about they lost on the swings.

So then, if you see that on the other hand existence is musical in nature, that is to say that it is not serious; it is a play of all kinds of patterns. We can look upon different creatures as we look upon different games. Or you can look at them as different styles of music. There are all these different things doing their stuff, and they are going about in different rhythms; and we're doing that. If you were in a flying saucer from Mars or somewhere and you came and looked to try and make out what was living on this world, from about ten thousand feet at night or early morning, you would see these great ganglia with tentacles going out all over the place. And early in the morning you see little blobs of luminous particles going into the middle of them. And in the late afternoon or early evening it would spit them all out again. And they would say well this thing breathes, and it does it in a special rhythm; it goes in and out once every twenty-four hours. But then it rests a day and

it doesn't spit so much, and it spits in a different way; a kind of irregularity. And then it starts spitting again all over in the same way. Just like a musical rhythm goes this way and that way, it's just what it does.

And when you think a bit, what people really want to do with their time, what do they do when they are not being pushed around or somebody's telling them what to do? They like to make rhythms. They listen to music, they dance, or they sing, or they do something of a rhythmic nature; playing cards, bowling, or raising their elbows. Everybody wants to spend their time swinging. That's the nature of this whole thing we're in you see. Life is a swing, that's why it does it."

### ***Insecure Societies and Hermits:***

"They are not working class people; they are people who dropped out of college because they saw it was stupid. And they are that sort of people, some might call them beatniks. But you see the city doesn't like it, because they aren't owning the right sort of cars, therefore the local car salesman isn't doing business through them. They don't have lawns and so nobody can sell them lawnmowers. They hardly use dishwashers, appliances of that kind, they don't need them. And also they wear blue jeans and things like that, and so the local dress shops feel a bit put out having these people around. And they live very simply. Well you must not do that; you have got to live in a complicated way. You have got to have the kind of car you know that identifies you as a person of substance and status and all that.

So there's a great problem here in our society. Now why is there this problem? There's always a very inconsiderable minority of these non-joiners or people who check out of the game. But you will find that insecure societies are the most intolerant of those who are non-joiners. They are so unsure of the validity of their game rules that they say everyone must play. Now that's a double-bind. You can't say to a person you must play because what you're saying is - you are required to do something which will be acceptable only if you do it voluntarily.

So everyone must play is the rule in the United States. And it's the rule in almost all Republican governments; I mean republican in the sense of democratic. They are very uneasy because everybody's responsible. You may try not to be and avoid it, and say oh let the senators take care of it or the president. But theoretically everyone is responsible; now that's terrifying. See its more like when you know what's right, there is an aristocracy, the clergy, and they know what's to be done and they are used to ruling. But now it's in your hands, and you say well what are we going to do? Well I think this way and he thinks that way, and so we're all unsettled. And therefore we become more and more conformist. Individualism, rugged individualism always leads to conformism, because people get scared. And so they herd together, then compound it with industrial society - mass production, etc. They all wear the same clothes, and they are sensible clothes that don't show the dirt too much and we get dollar and drabber.

So the reason for this in a way is because Democracy as we have tried it - started out on the wrong foot. You see in the scripture, the Christian scriptures, it says everybody is equal in the sight of god. Now that's a mystical utterance. That means that from the standpoint of God, all people are divine, and are playing their true function. And that is something that is true on a certain plane of consciousness. But come down a step and try to apply the mystical insight in the practical affairs of everyday life and what do you get. You get a parody of mysticism. You get the idea not that everybody is equal in the sight of god, but that all people are equally inferior. That's why all bureaucracies are rude; why the police are rude, and why you are made to wait in lines, and all that sort of person. Because everybody's a crook, everybody's equally inferior; you see that becomes the parody of democracy. And that kind of society - watch out for it. It turns in a quick click into fascism, because of its terror of the outsider.

Now a free and easy society loves outsiders. In fact it's a little bad for the outsiders' integrity, because he becomes holy man. And people make Salaams and give him food and they really take care of the outsider. Because they know that man is doing for us what we haven't got the guts to do. That outside that lives up in the mountain is up at the highest peak of human evolution. His consciousness is one with the divine. And great just that there is someone like that around; makes you feel a little better. He has realized, he knows what it's all about. And so we need a number of those people. Even though they don't join our game they tell us, you see, what you're doing is only a game. It's ok I'm not going to condemn you, it's only a game and we up on that mountaintop are watching you, we love you, we have compassion for you - but excuse please we aren't going to join. So that gives a community great strength, because it tells the government in no uncertain terms, that there is something more than government."

### ***Higher Self:***

"Today I want to concentrate on that aspect of Zen practice, which is called in Chinese 'mo cho chu' or going straight ahead. A master who was once asked - what is the Tao; the way? - replied, walk on. Actually - go, as we say - go man go! And it is this aspect of Zen which is what is truly understood by detachment or having a mind that isn't sticky and that isn't stopped in its whole working.

To be stopped at a certain point is what is called having a doubt. As when one fumbles, or wobbles, or hesitates about something; trying to find the right solution for the circumstances by thinking it out, in a situation where there really is no time to think it out. So that when a Zen teacher asks his disciple a question he expects an immediate answer, as it were without thought or premeditation.

They speak in Zen, using a certain phrase - to have a mind of no deliberation. And they also speak of a kind of person, a man that doesn't depend on anything. That is to say on a formula, on a theory, on a belief to govern his action. And this person,

who doesn't stick anywhere, is like Dante's image at the end of the Paradiso. Where he says in the presence of the vision of god, - 'but my volition now and my desires were moved as a wheel revolving evenly by love that moves the sun and other stars.' And the image of the wheel which is not too tight on its axle and not too loose; that is really with the axle, is the Zen principle of not being attached - not being sticky.

It is very difficult for us to function in that way because we have been brought up to believe that there are two sides to ourselves. One - the animal side, the other - the human and civilized side. These are expressed in what Freud calls the pleasure principle, which he classifies with the animal side (the id). And the other - the reality principle, which he puts on the side of society (the superego). Man is so split he is in a constant fight between these two. Philosophists sometimes speak of us having two selves - the higher self, which is spiritual, and the lower self which is merely psychic - the ego.

Therefore the problem of life is to make the one self - the higher one - take charge of the lower as a rider takes charge of a horse. But the problem that constantly arises is - how do you know that what you think is your higher self, isn't really your lower self in disguise. When a thief is robbing a house and the police enter on the ground floor, the thief goes up to the second floor, and when the police follow up the stairs the thief goes higher and higher until at last he gets out at the rooftop. And in the same way, when one really feels oneself to be the lower self that is to be a separate ego, and then the moralists come along - they are of course the police - and say 'you are not to be selfish' - then the ego disassembles and he tries to pretend that he is a good person after all.

Therefore one of the ways of doing this is for the ego to say - 'I believe I have a higher self.' And I would say why do you believe that? Do you know the higher self? 'No if I knew it I would behave differently. But I am trying to get there.' Well why are you trying to get there? 'Well then the police wouldn't come around. Then the moralists wouldn't preach at me. And I could feel I was doing my duty, behaving as a proper member of society.' But all this is a great phony front.

If you don't know that there is a higher self and you believe that there is one, on whose authority do you believe this? You say well such and such a teacher - Buddha, Jesus, or whomever said that we have a higher self. And I believe it. Catholics sometimes say they believe their religion because they are told to, and they have to be obedient. The Baltimore catechism starts out - we are bound to believe that there is but one god, father almighty - creator of the heaven and earth etc. And they make jokes about the Protestants and say they don't have real authority in the protestant church because everybody interprets the bible according to his own opinion. But we have an authoritative interpretation of the bible.

However this always screens out the fact that, it is fundamentally a matter of your own opinion that you accept the authority of the church to interpret the bible. You cannot escape, in all matter of belief, from opinion. In other words, it must become clear to you that you yourself create all the authorities you accept. And if you create them, in order to dissimulate, in order to pretend that your motivations and your character are different, that you would like them to be different, this is the same old principle of the separate self trying to improve itself so that it will live longer or survive in the spiritual world, or attain the riches and progress of enlightenment, and the whole thing is phony.

So in Zen, a duality between a higher self and a lower self is not made. Because if you believe in the higher self, this is a simple trick of the lower self. If you believe that there is no really lower self, there is only the higher self but that somehow or other the higher self has to shine through, the very fact that you think it has to shine through still gives validity to the existence of a lower self. If you think you have a lower self, or an ego to get rid of, then you fight against it, nothing strengthens the delusion that it exists more than that.

So this tremendous schizophrenia in humans beings, of thinking that they are rider and horse, soul in command of body, or will in command of passions - wrestling with them; all that kind of split thinking simply aggravates the problem, and we get more and more split. And so we have all sorts of people engaged in an interior conflict which they will never resolve. Because the true self either you know it, or you don't. If you do know it, then you know it's the only one and the other so called lower self just ceases to be a problem. It becomes something like a mirage, and you don't go around hitting at mirages with a stick, or trying to put reigns on them. You just know that they are mirages and walk straight through them. But if you were brought up to believe yourself split, I remember my mother used to say to me when I used to do naughty things. She would say - Alan that's not like you. So I had some conception of what was like me in my better moments that is to say, in my moments where I remembered what my mother would like me to do. And so that split is embedded in us all."

### ***The Web of Life:***

"In exploring the theme of the web of life, I have thus far discussed two principle topics. First, the web of considered a selectivity; experience considered as what we pay attention to on the one hand and what we ignore on the other. And I showed how the way in which we pay attention to the world creates - isolates (I'm using that as a noun). Isolates that we call particular things, events, and persons, and they seem to be disconnected and alone because we ignore the connections between them.

Now in the second part of the theme was the web as mutuality. And I discussed how the existence of a web, the existence of cloth or anything like that, depends on a

mutual support of the others. And this miraculous thing occurs that when the things support each other, being comes into being; cloth comes into being. And so in exactly the same way, our world is a manifestation of relativity. And this requires a balance, a combination, a relationship of opposites in every domain of life. And although these opposites are explicitly different and even antagonistic, they are implicitly one, and that's the secret.

Now this afternoon I'm going to take two other aspects of the web - the web is a trap, like the spiders web is a trap for flies. Also the lovely embroideries are worn by women as traps for men, from a certain point of view. And I want to consider the web as something playful. You see there are so many ways of looking at it. And you will find that all these ways are right but what we need is the fullness of the view. There are people for example who can see the web as a trap and get stuck with that.

There are people to who existence is completely hateful. They see it as nothing but a ghastly mistake. The lord really erred when he created this world because he arranged it in such a way that everything lives by eating something else. And what I'm doing is describing a certain point of view you see. For example there is no such thing as genuine kindness or love. Everybody is really pretending they are loving other people in order to gain some advantage from them. And indeed there is a point of view which occurs in some form of paranoia where people don't seem to be real. They are mechanisms, and you can think that out quite intensely with a good deal of intelligence.

After all if you start out with a good old Darwinian or Freudian basis and see that man is a material machine, and that the consciousness of man is simply a very evolved and complicated form of chemistry, and that's what it is you see. Well than these awful mechanical things, these Frankenstein's that everybody is, they come around and they sell well I'm alive! I'm a human being, I have a heart - I love, I hate, I have problems, I feel. And you feel like saying come off it. You're just a monster and you put on this civilized act because you're really just a set of teeth on the end of a tube. And you've got a ganglion behind those teeth which you call your brain or your alleged mind. And this thing is really basically there for two purposes. One, to be cunning enough to get something to eat - to put down the tube. And the other, you know what, Mr. Freud's' libido. And everything else you see can be construed as an elaborate, subtle way of pretending that that's not really what you want to do. But you do, and you put on a great show. Now some people according to this view get mixed up. They get so repressed that what they really want to do is to eat and to screw that they get involved into higher things that are the masks for these activities and think that that's the real purpose of life. And then they become what's called neurotic.

Everybody should do in their lifetime, sometime, two things. One is to consider death. To observe skulls and skeletons and wonder what it will be like to go to sleep

and never wake up – never! That is a very gloomy thing for contemplation, but it's like manure. Just as manure fertilizes the plants and so on, so the contemplation of death and the acceptance of death is very highly generative of creating life. You'll get wonderful things out of that.

And the other thing to contemplate is to follow the possibility of the idea that you are totally selfish. That you don't have a good thing to be said for you at all; you are a complete, utter rascal. Now, the Christians have avoided this because although they say in their Episcopalian form of confession – that we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep and we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, too much. We have offended against thy holy laws, and we have left undone those things we ought to have done and we have done those things we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. But, it ought to be different, and we are going to do our best to amend with the help of god's grace. And that is a real common act because if you equate health with genuine love and perfect unselfishness, then in that sense there is no health in us when we look at ourselves from this point of view.

Now when you go deeply into the nature of selfishness, what do you discover? You say I love myself I seek my own advantage. Now what is the self that I love? What do I want? And that becomes an increasingly ever deepening puzzle. Now I've often referred to this when you say to someone else – I love you. It's always rather disconcerting to the person to whom you say that. If you imply that you love them with a pure disinterested and holy love, they automatically suspect it as being a little phony. But if you say – I love you so much I could eat you. That's an expression as a way of saying to a person that you attract me so much that I can't help it; I'm absolutely bowled over for you, I'm gone. And people like that, then they feel like they are really being loved and it's absolutely genuine. But now – I love you so much I can eat you, now what the devil do I want? I certainly don't want to eat the girl in the sense of literally devouring her, because then she'd disappear.

But I love myself. Now what is me? In what way do I know me? Well it suddenly occurs to me that I know me only in terms of you. See when I think of anything that I know and that I like, then it's always something that can be viewed as other than me. I can never get to look at me – the real me, it's always behind, and it's always hidden. And I really don't know well enough to know if I love it or not, maybe I don't. Maybe it's an appalling mess. But certainly the things that I do love and that I do want from a selfish point of view, when I really think about them they are all something else – that's in a way outside me.

Now we saw that there is a reciprocity; a total mutual interdependence between what we call the self and what we call the other. And so if you are perfectly honest about loving yourself and you don't pull any punches, you don't pretend that you are anything other than exactly what you are; you suddenly come to discover that the self you love, if you really go into it, is the universe. You don't like all of it;

you're selective about it because as we saw at the beginning, perception is selection. But on the whole, you love yourself in terms of what is other, because it's only in terms of what is other that you have a self at all."

### ***The Road to Here:***

"Let's say we take us the basic supposition which is the thing that one sees and the experience of awakening or whatever you want to call it. That this now moment, in which I'm talking and you are listening, is eternity. That although we have somehow calmed ourselves into the notion that this moment is rather ordinary, and that we may not feel very well, and that we are 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 must not try to do anything, because that is doing something; and how to explain that, because there is nothing to explain, because that is the way it is now you see. And if you understand that, it will automatically wake you up.

That's why Zen teachers use shock treatment. Sometimes they hit people or shout at them to create a sudden surprise, because it is that jolt that suddenly brings you - here. See there is no road to here, because you are already there. So you see when you ask how do I attain the knowledge of god? How do I attain Nirvana?...Liberation? All I can say is it's the wrong question. Why do you want to attain it? Because the very fact that you're wanting to attain 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 life game and 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 that you don't want to be; you're still playing the hide part of the game. You're still as it were the self, pretending it's not the self. That's what you want to do. So you see in that way too you're already there.

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 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. 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 have power over other people, so that you could alter what they are doing. And that you are omnipotent in a crude, literal kind of bible sense. And a lot of people feel that and they go crazy; they think they are Jesus Christ and that everybody ought to fall down and worship them. That is only they have their wires crossed; this experience happened to them and they don't know how to interpret it.

So be careful of that. Yung calls it inflation; people who get the holy man syndrome. That I've suddenly discovered that I'm the lord and that I am above good and evil and so on. And that therefore I start giving myself heirs and graces. But the point is that everybody else is too. If you discover that you're there you ought to know that everyone else is.

Well for example, let's see how in other ways you might realize this. Most people think when they open their eyes and look around, that what they are seeing is outside, it seems doesn't it that you are behind your eyes. And that behind the eyes there is a blank that you can't see at all; you turn around and you see something in front of you. But behind the eyes, there seems to be something that has no color, it isn't dark, and it isn't light. It's there from a tactile standpoint; you can feel it with your fingers, although you don't get inside it. Well than what is it that's 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 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 think that then therefore the external world is all inside my skull. But you've got to correct that, with the thought that your skull is also in the external world.

So you suddenly begin to feel well what of a kind of situation is this? It's inside me, and I'm inside it. But that's the way it is. This is what you could call the 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 organism and the environment is transactional. The environment grows the organism and organism in turn creates the environment. The organism turns the sun into light, but it requires there to be an environment containing a sun for there to be an organism at all.

Now the answer to it all is they are all one process. And it isn't that organisms by chance came into this world, but rather that this world is sort of the environment which grows organisms. It was that way from the beginning. The organisms made 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 sitting here, were involved in it.

You see, let's 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 our power source and here we have our switch. Now, before that switch closes; the current doesn't behave exactly 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 will take an interval for that current to get going, but the finishing point has to be closed before it will even start from the beginning. In a similar way although 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 the current through the wire; it takes a little 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.

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 up against this 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?"