

# TAOISM

## WAY BEYOND SEEKING

---

THE EDITED TRANSCRIPTS

Alan Watts

☐ THE "LOVE OF WISDOM" LIBRARY ☐

*It has been said that Alan Watts touches the heart of wisdom in ways that continue to flower and inspire.*

---

This book is derived from lectures by Alan Watts between 1968 and 1973. With colorful titles such as "The Philosophy of the Tao," "Being in the Way," and "Landscape, Soundscape" his seminars drew an enthusiastic crowd of diverse interests. Some came because they were students of Watts, others because they were looking for the latest trend in the counterculture movement, and some came because they were captivated by the intrigue of a philosophy in tune with the course of nature. All came away with a newfound fascination with the Tao, and in the possibility that an ancient Oriental way of being in touch with the true "nature of nature" might guide a technological culture toward reunification with the rest of the planet.

*Taoism: Way Beyond Seeking* recaptures the energy of these seminars and shows that the words of Alan Watts are as relevant and prophetic today as they were over twenty-five years ago.

**BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**Copley Square**





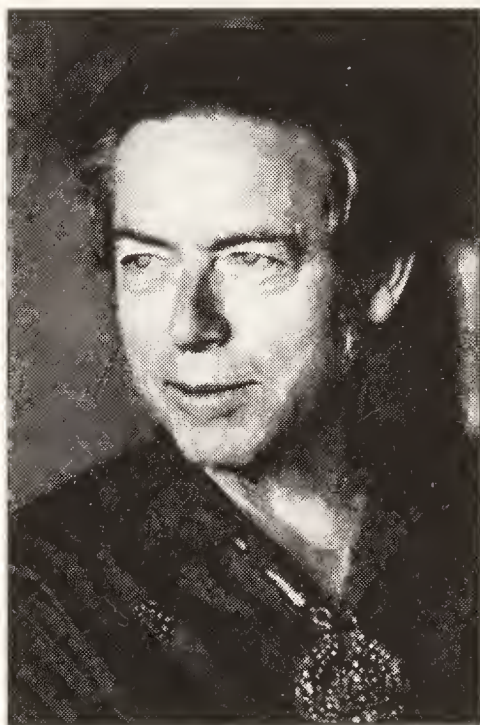
# TAOISM

WAY BEYOND SEEKING

---

THE EDITED TRANSCRIPTS

*Alan Watts*



ALAN WATTS  
at a seminar aboard the SS *Vallejo*, 1966

# TAOISM

WAY BEYOND SEEKING

---

THE EDITED TRANSCRIPTS

Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc.  
Boston ♦ Rutland, Vermont ♦ Tokyo

First published in 1998 by Tuttle Publishing, an imprint of Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd., with editorial offices at 153 Milk Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02109.

Copyright © 1997 Mark Watts

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from Tuttle Publishing.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Watts, Alan, 1915-1973.

Taoism : way beyond seeking / by Alan Watts.

p. cm. — (The Alan Watts love of wisdom library ; 5)

ISBN 0-8048-3058-4 (hard)

I. Taoism. I. Title. II. Series: Watts, Alan, 1915-1973. Alan Watts "Love of wisdom" library ; 5.

BL1920.T375 1998

299'.514—dc21

97-49648  
CIP

Distributed by

USA  
Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc.  
RR 1 Box 2315  
North Clarendon, VT 05759  
Tel.: (802) 773-8930  
Fax.: (802) 773-6993

Southeast Asia  
Berkeley Books Pte. Ltd.  
5 Little Road #08-01  
Singapore 536983  
Tel.: (65) 280-3320  
Fax.: (65) 280-6290

Japan  
Tuttle Shokai Ltd.  
1-21-13, Seki  
Tama-ku, Kawasaki-shi  
Kanagawa-ken 214, Japan  
Tel.: (044) 833-0225  
Fax.: (044) 822-0413

First edition

05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2


Design by Frances Kay  
Cover design by Sherry Fatla

Printed in the United States of America

BL1920  
.T375  
1998

## CONTENTS

Introduction	vii
I. Philosophy of the Tao I	i
II. Philosophy of the Tao II	17
III. The World as Organic Process	33
IV. Being in the Way I	51
V. Being in the Way II	71
VI. Landscape, Soundscape	91



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation

## INTRODUCTION

---

**F**or the contemporary Western reader, the philosophy of the Tao holds a particular fascination. On one hand we admire the ingenuity of a way of life having the sensibility to flow with the current of the river, split wood with the grain, and ride the wind by raising a sail. On the other we are intrigued by the suggestion that men should hold the passive in high regard, seek the obscure or lowest position, and model their strategy according to the yielding principle. With its inclusive approach, the Taoist worldview reconciles the underlying mysteries of existence to the pragmatic concerns of daily life and finds a unique equilibrium between balance and imbalance.

In the passages of the *Tao Te Ching*, “The Book of the Way” one finds advice that is at once practical and profound, both natural and elegant, wise and sophisticated yet unassuming. The Taoist texts we have come to know in the translations of the *Tao Te Ching* were collected during the Warring States period in China, a time of great turmoil and danger for the common man. As such, the philosophy embodied in the legendary texts of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu places great emphasis upon the value of survival and points to the path of least resistance as the surest road to security and peace of mind. It makes a strong case for the wisdom of “lying low,” without aspirations or pretensions, which may bring inner turmoil, discontent, or even physical harm. It is interesting to note that the collected texts of the *Tao Te Ching* make frequent references to sages, but in context they are understood to be princes and kings, that is, the rulers of the domain. One theory is that the texts embody an attempt to bring the oral tradition of a certain kind of popular story expressing the wisdom of the “old boy” to the attention of the nobility. It was perhaps thought that by doing so the perspective of the rulers might be transformed for the benefit of both the state and the common man.

These stories were often set on a remote mountain or in a cave where a wise hermit would greet the uninformed seeker, who at times was Confucius himself. In a typical story, Confucius sought the advice of the sage, only to be told to shed his vanity and conceit to see his own nature more clearly, and to then act accordingly. Another common theme developed around the power of the Tao is seen in the harmony between these legendary hermits and the world. In one of Alan Watts’s favorite stories, an old man wandering near a wild river plunged into a cataract, only to emerge downstream, unharmed and unconcerned. However, underneath the wide variety

of these refreshing stories lie two essential themes, repeated time and time again.

The first involves a practical appreciation of emptiness, of the vacant, the fundamental, and therefore, the useful. We read in Lao-tzu's book that "profit comes from what is there, usefulness from what is not." And, "Thirty spokes has the wheel, but it is its hub that makes it useful." The strategic advantage of recognizing the value of space is not only practical, however, because the bowl, representing space, is also a metaphor for the vessel of consciousness, and what is true of a ceramic bowl is also true of the mind—it works best when empty. So the idea of the Tao is often equated with emptiness in the first book, although, paradoxically, it is also referred to as "the One" or "the Way."

The second theme of the *Tao Te Ching* is virtue. To clearly understand this designation it is useful to shed our common associations with the words *virtue* and *nature* and go back to their earlier English usage. Formerly these terms did not carry moral connotations or imply division—of the virtuous as opposed to the wicked, or of nature as opposed to man. In their original sense these terms referred to the virtues, qualities, or nature of something, that is to say, its true character. The second book of the *Tao* emphasizes the subtle transforming aspect of Tao, deriving directly from the first book, which emphasizes the essential power of emptiness. Once the mind is clear, and therefore open, one may discover the true nature of life. Or, in other words, if your mind is not full of preconceived notions, you may learn something new.

So then, like Buddhism, Hinduism, and early forms of almost all religions, Taoism is in essence a transformative discipline. However, *discipline* is a misleading word to use in the context of the philosophy of nature, for its practice is as easy as falling into the river.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Alan Watts delighted audiences across the country with stories about wise Taoist hermits. In his earliest works on Zen, written in England before he was twenty-one, he noted the Taoist influence on the school of Mahayana Buddhism in China known as *Chan* Buddhism. Chan became Zen in Japan, and although in its Japanese form Zen became associated with the samurai, it retains to this day a Taoist flavor in its appreciation of the advantages of emptiness. Numerous Zen koans, which take the form of a puzzle or riddle (although *koan* actually means “case”), portray instances in which the master, in one way or another, points out to the student his fixation on a limited way of seeing, and then offers, in a somewhat clever way, an opportunity for the student to grasp the essence with an empty mind. In his later years, Watts became increasingly fascinated with the Tao, and in his last book he dedicated himself to a comprehensive review of the subject, much as he had done in his classic 1957 work on Zen, *The Way of Zen*.

The following chapters are derived from lectures delivered between 1968 and 1973 by Watts during weekend seminars. With such colorful titles as “The Philosophy of the Tao,” “Being in the Way,” and “Landscape, Soundscape, in Painting, Music, and Mystical Vision,” his seminars drew an enthusiastic crowd with diverse interests. Some came because they were students of Watts’s, others because they were looking for the latest trend in the counterculture movement, and a few came because they were intrigued by a philosophy that pointed out the wisdom of putting up a sail to catch the wind instead of rowing. However, *all* came away with a newfound fascination with the Tao and with the possibility that a classic Oriental way of being in touch with the true “nature of nature” might guide a

technological culture toward reunification with the rest of the planet.

Alan Watts died in 1973 before completing *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, but while I worked with him on the early chapters on Chinese writing and the Tao, my father told me that after he finished the groundwork of presenting the primary aspects of Taoism, he was going to enjoy its more playful and artistic aspects in the later chapters. In this volume, and in the previous volume entitled, *The Tao of Philosophy*, (from the Love of Wisdom Library series) we have endeavored to complete his intended presentation of the philosophy of the Tao, by presenting the Tao first in terms of contemporary culture and now in the spirit of its delightful simplicity and disarming candor.

—Mark Watts



# PHILOSOPHY OF THE TAO I

---

## CHAPTER ONE

**I**n order to go into Taoism at all, we must begin by being in the frame of mind in which it can be understood. You cannot force yourself into this frame of mind any more than you can smooth disturbed water with your hand. But let's say that our starting point is that we forget what we know, or think we know. And that we suspend judgment about practically everything, returning to what we were when we were babies—before we learned the names or the language. In such a state, although we have extremely sensitive bodies and very alive senses, we have no means of making an intellectual or verbal commentary on what is going on.

In this state you just feel what *is*, without calling it anything at all. You know nothing at all about anything called an external world in relation to an internal world. You don't know who *you* are, you haven't even the idea of the words *you* or *I*—it is before all that. Nobody has taught you self-control. You don't know the difference between the noise of a car outside and a wandering thought that enters your mind. They are both something that happens. You don't identify the presence of a thought that may be just an image of a passing cloud in your mind's eye or the passing automobile; they simply happen. Your breath happens. Light, all around you, happens. Your response to it by blinking, happens.

You are simply unable to do anything. There is nothing you are supposed to do. Nobody has told you anything to do. You are completely unable to do anything but be aware of the buzz. The visual buzz, the audible buzz, the tangible buzz, the smellable buzz—all buzz. It's going on, so watch it.

Don't ask who is watching it; you have no information about that yet. You don't know that it requires a watcher for something to be watched. That is somebody's idea. You don't know that. Lao-tzu says, "The scholar learns something every day, the man of Tao unlearns something every day, until he gets back to non-doing." Just simply, without comment, without an idea in your head, be aware. What else can you do? You don't try to be aware; you are. You will find, of course, that you cannot stop the commentary going on inside your head, but at least you can regard it as interior noise. Listen to your chattering thoughts as you would listen to the singing of a kettle.

We don't know what it is we are aware of, especially when we take it altogether, and there's this sense of something going on. I can't even really say "this,"

although I said “something going on.” But that is an idea, a form of words. Obviously I couldn’t say something is going on unless I could say something else isn’t. I know motion by contrast with rest, and while I am aware of *motion* I am also aware of *at rest*. So maybe what’s at rest *isn’t* going on and what’s in motion *is* going on, but I won’t use that concept because in order for it to make sense I have to include both. If I say, “Here it is,” that excludes what isn’t, like space. If I say “this,” it excludes *that*, and I am reduced to silence. But you can feel what I am talking about. That’s what is called *tao*, in Chinese. That’s where we begin.

*Tao* means basically “way,” or “course”; the course of nature. Lao-tzu said the way of the functioning of the Tao is tzu-jan, or “so of itself”; that is to say, it is spontaneous. Watch again what is going on. If you approach it with this wise ignorance, you will see that you are witnessing a happening. In other words, in this primal way of looking at things there is no difference between what you do, on the one hand, and what happens to you, on the other. It is all the same process. Just as your thoughts happen, the car happens outside, and so the clouds and the stars.

When a Westerner hears that he thinks it is some sort of fatalism or determinism, but that is because he still preserves in the back of his mind two illusions. One is that what is happening is happening to him, and therefore he is the victim of circumstances. But when you are in primal ignorance, there is no *you* different from what is happening, and therefore it is not happening to you. It is just happening. And so is “you,” or what you call you, or what you will later call you. It is part of the happening, and you are part of the universe, although strictly speaking the universe has no parts. We only call certain features of the universe parts. But you can’t disconnect

them from the rest without causing them not only to be nonexistent but never to have existed at all.

When one experiences oneself and the universe as happening together, the other illusion one is liable to have is that what is happening now follows necessarily from what happened in the past. But you don't know anything about that in your primal ignorance. Cause and effect? Why, obviously not, because if you are really naive you see that the past is the result of what is happening now. It goes backward into the past, like a wake goes backward from a ship. All the echoes are disappearing finally; they go away, and away, and away. And it is all starting now. What we call the future is nothing, the great void, and everything comes out of the great void. If you shut your eyes and contemplate reality only with your ears, you will find there is a background of silence, and all sounds are coming out of it. They start out of silence. If you close your eyes and just listen, you will observe that the sound comes out of nothing and then floats off, and the echo dies and becomes a memory, which is another kind of echo. It is very simple; it all begins now, and therefore it is spontaneous. It isn't determined; that is a philosophical notion. Nor is it capricious; that's another philosophical notion. We distinguish between what is orderly and what is random. But of course we don't really know what randomness is. What is "so of itself," *sui generis* in Latin, means coming into being spontaneously on its own accord, and that, incidentally, is the real meaning of virgin birth. And that is the world, that is the Tao.

But perhaps that scares us. We may ask, "If all that is happening spontaneously, who's in charge? I am not in charge, that's pretty obvious, but I hope there is God or *somebody* looking after all this." But why should there be someone looking after it? Because then

there is a *new* worry that you may not have thought of, which is, "Who takes care of the caretaker's daughter while the caretaker is busy taking care?" Who guards the guards? Who polices the police? Who looks after God? You may say, "God doesn't need looking after." Oh? Well, then, nor does *this*.

The Tao is a certain kind of order, and this kind of order is not quite what we call order when we arrange everything geometrically in boxes or in rows. That is a very crude kind of order, but when you look at a bamboo plant, it is perfectly obvious that the plant has order. We recognize at once that it is not a mess, but it is not symmetrical and it is not geometrical. The plant looks like a Chinese drawing. The Chinese appreciated this kind of nonsymmetrical order so much that they put it into their painting. In the Chinese language this is called *li*, and the character for li originally meant the markings in jade. It also means the grain in wood and the fiber in muscle. We could say, too, that clouds have li, marble has li, the human body has li. We all recognize it, and the artist copies it whether he is a landscape painter, a portrait painter, an abstract painter, or a nonobjective painter. They are all trying to express the essence of li. The interesting thing is that although we know what it is, there is no way of defining it. Because Tao is the course, we can also call li the watercourse, and the patterns of li are also the patterns of flowing water. We see those patterns of flow memorialized, as it were, as sculpture in the grain in wood, which is the flow of sap, and in marble, in bones, in muscles. All these things are patterned according to the basic principles of flow. In the patterns of flowing water you will see all kind of motifs from Chinese art. They are immediately recognizable, and often include the S-curve in the circle of yang-yin. So li suggests, then, the order of flow,

## CHAPTER ONE

the wonderful dancing pattern of liquid, because Lao-tzu likens Tao to water:

*The great Tao flows everywhere,  
to the left and to the right,  
It loves and nourishes all things,  
but does not lord it over them.*

For as he comments elsewhere, water always seeks the lowest level, which men abhor because we are always trying to play games of one-upmanship. But Lao-tzu explains that the top position is the most insecure. Everybody wants to get to the top of the tree, but if they do the tree will collapse. That is the fallacy of American democracy. You, too, might become president, but the result is that no one in their right mind would want to be president. After all, who wants to be put in charge of a runaway truck?

Lao-tzu says the basic position is the most powerful, and this we can see at once in judo or in aikido. In the arts of self-defense, you always get underneath the opponent, so he falls over you if he attacks you. The moment he moves to be aggressive, you either go lower than he is or move in a smaller circle than he is moving. And you have spin, if you know aikido. You are always spinning; and you know how something spinning exercises centrifugal force, and if someone comes into your field of centrifugal force, he gets flung out by his own bounce. It's very curious.

So, the watercourse way is the way of Tao. Now, that seems to Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and to Irish Catholics, lazy, spineless, *passive*. And I am always being asked when I talk about things, "If people did what you suggest, wouldn't they become terribly passive?" Well, from a superficial point of view I would suggest that a certain amount of passivity would be an excellent corrective for our kind of culture, because we

are always creating trouble by doing good to other people. We wage wars for other people's benefit and attempt to help those living in "underdeveloped" countries, not realizing that in the process we may destroy their way of life. Economies and cultures that have coexisted in ecological balance for thousands of years have been disrupted all around the world, with often disastrous results.

So, a certain amount of doing nothing would allow everything to cool down. And in ceasing to rush around, it will come to light that passivity is the root of action. After all, where do you suppose your energy comes from? From simply being energetic? No, that is how you exhaust yourself! To have energy you must sleep, but even more important than sleep is passivity of mind, or mental silence. These things are not important because they are good for you but because you've come to the realization that there is nothing else you can do. For goodness' sake, don't cultivate passivity as a form of progress: that is like playing because having fun is good for your work. So don't force it, because when you try to force an issue, that just wears you out. When you force a lock, you usually bend the key, so instead, jiggle gently. Anyone who knows how to conduct business always jiggles the key to find the right moment to open the lock, and then it all happens as if it were natural and not forced.

Therefore, appreciation of the watercourse will give you the sense that your life is a "flowing." The flowing is equally you and not you, or what at least is called not-you. It is the process, what is happening, and when you understand that, you will stop asking questions about it. You will see that all the question-asking of questions about it is tautological. You receive explanations, but they don't explain. All explanations call for further explanations because, to paraphrase an old

poem, big explanations have little explanations on their backs to bite them, and little explanations have lesser explanations upon them, and so on, ad infinitum. This is the analytic process that leads from the visible universe to the atomic universe to the subatomic universe to the protonic universe, and so on, ad infinitum. And from the earth it leads outward to the solar system, to the galaxy, to systems of galaxies, and on and on. It leads in the other direction too, because the universe, as it seeks to know itself, must run away from you because you *are* the universe. Your eyes are apertures through which it is aware of itself—holes in the wall, as it were. So as you look, you blink: now you see it, now you don't. It is very simple. And therefore the big questions—What is it? What am I supposed to do? What is human destiny? Why are we here?—will slowly disappear, and their disappearance will be their answer. The answer is that what is going on cannot be described. The Tao cannot be described. It is simultaneously departing and arriving, always flowing, constantly changing. That is the meaning of “the eternal Tao.” So, Lao-tzu says of Tao: “Tao does nothing, but nothing is left undone.”

Along with the idea of the watercourse, there is another Taoist idea called *wu wei* by Lao-tzu. Wu means “not.” Wei has a complex of meanings: “action,” “striving,” “straining,” or “doing.” But the best translation of all is “forcing.” So, “not forcing” is *wu wei*. In other words, Tao accomplishes all things without forcing them. And so, I was about to say, “When you master Tao,” but *master* is the wrong word because it implies the possibility of being superior to Tao, which is impossible. Therefore let us say, when you come to *wu wei*, you are working on the same principle as the Tao. This principle is likened, poetically, to the difference between a willow and a pine in a snowstorm. The pine is a rigid tree and the snow and ice will pile up on its branches

until they crack. The willow is a springy tree. When the weight of the snow becomes too much for its branches, they droop, the snow falls off them, and then they bounce up again. That is wu wei.

Chuang-tzu tells a lovely tale about a sage who was wandering along the bank of a river near an enormous cataract. Suddenly, way up at the top of it, he saw an old man roll off the bank into the water, and he thought, "This man must be old and ill and is putting an end to himself." But a few minutes later, way down below the cataract, the old man jumped out of the stream and started running along the bank. So the sage and his disciples hurried, scooting after him and, having caught up with him told him that what he'd done had been the most amazing thing they'd ever seen. "How did you survive?" they asked. "Well," he answered, "there is no special trick. I just went in with a swirl and came out with a whirl. I made myself like the water, so that there was no conflict between me and the water."

In this same way, when a baby is in an automobile accident, it will often remain uninjured, because it doesn't tense up and become rigid during the crash to protect itself. Likewise, in judo, you are taught to curl up limply when you fall and yet make your arms very heavy, so that they flop against the ground with an immense thud. That "making heavy" is again like water, and absorbs the shock.

Therefore, you must realize that the watercourse way is not a way of complete limpness. Water has weight, and its energy is gravity, and therefore it has strength. That is the secret of wu wei. If the earth were to encounter some obstacle in space, there would be an enormous release of energy because of gravity. The earth is falling around the sun, and the sun is falling around something else, and so the whole universe itself is falling. But since there is nothing outside it, and therefore

nowhere for it to fall, it is not falling “at” anything. It is just falling around itself, and so gravity is its energy. That is the secret of judo.

Now, if you want to find an intelligent solution to a problem, your brain can do the work. You have all the necessary intelligence inside the bone of your skull. However, most people never use their brains; they use their minds instead, and they use their minds the same way they use their muscles. You can strain your head just as if it were a muscle, and work very hard trying to arrive at an answer, but it doesn’t really work that way. When you really want to find an answer to something, what you need to do is contemplate the problem. Visualize your question as well as you can, and then simply wait. If you don’t, and if instead you try to find the solution through brute mental strength, you may be disappointed, because any solution that comes in that way is likely to be wrong. But when you have waited for a while, the solution will come of itself. That is how to use your brain, and it will work for you in the same way that your stomach will digest your food for you without your having to supervise it consciously. Our attempts to supervise everything consciously have all led to consequences that aren’t too good for our stomach, and the reason for that is quite simple. Conscious attention, which employs words, cannot think of very much. We are forced, therefore, to ignore almost everything while we are thinking. We think along a single track, but the world doesn’t proceed along a single track. The world is everything happening altogether everywhere, and you just can’t take all of that into consideration because there isn’t time. However, your brain *can* take it all into consideration because it is capable of handling innumerable variables at once, even though your conscious attention cannot. Verbal symbols are not capable of handling

any more than a single very crude and simple track, and that is why we have to trust our brains. We are much more intelligent than we understand ourselves to be. So, when a neurologist admits that he has only begun to scratch the surface of understanding the nervous system, he is actually saying that his own nervous system is smarter than he is. It has outwitted him so far, and all of this is remarkable. What you are is necessarily more than anything you can understand, for the simple reason that an organism cannot completely understand itself any more than you can kiss your own lips or lift yourself up by your own bootstraps. So, there is always this element of the unknown in any process of consciousness. And if that fact irritates you, remember that fire doesn't need to burn itself, and light doesn't need to shine on itself. If light were to ask, "What am I?" how could you answer it?

For many hundreds of years, human beings have wanted to know the nature of *isness*. "What is matter, substance?" Obviously, it would seem, there must be a basis for all the shapes that we see. After all, clay is the basis of vessels. Iron is the basis of tools. Wood is the basis of furniture. But what is the basis of wood, iron, or clay? What is the substance common to everything? Well, we have tried to find out, but when you consider the question, you must ask yourself what sort of answer you are looking for. Suppose you did find out what matter is. In what sort of language would you be able to describe it? If you thought about the world, then you would realize that you couldn't describe it at all, because the only thing language can describe—whether it be the language of words or of numbers—is pattern and form. We can measure form, we can outline it, we can explain it. But we couldn't possibly explain plain old basic *stuff*. There would be no way of talking about it. Therefore

the question about the *isness* of matter is a silly question. We are demanding that it be answered in terms that cannot convey an answer to that kind of question.

Therefore, *all* we can talk about is form or pattern. I could use a pun to talk about that idea and say it is the *form* that matters in anything. When you look at the world as form, you do not ask questions about what it is made of, or what these shapes are made of, because they are not made. *Wu wei* means “not making” as well as “no action,” and making is very different from growing. When a plant grows, it is not assembled. All its so-called parts grow out of it all together at once. Whereas, when you construct a machine, you assemble the parts and put them together one at a time. This is not the way a plant works, and it is not the way that you and I work. It is ridiculous to suppose that when you eat your food, it consists of body parts that are going to be added to your body to replace parts that have worn out. That is a silly idea, because things are grown, not made. So, you don’t ask, first of all, what they are made of. And the next thing you don’t ask is how they manage to grow.

This brings us to a very fascinating fact that we are unaware of, which is that so-called separate things are not really separate: they are joined by space. We always think of space as separating, but remember that which separates also joins. That is why the word *cleave* is so interesting. It means both to stick to and to divide. We are cleaved by space. So, when you look at a distant galaxy, it seems to be a single object because you are seeing it from a long way away. However, when you get close to it, that appearance disappears, and you see individual stars. We are living in the middle of a galaxy. From a long way away, all the stars in it would appear to form a single object. But right close up, where we’re sitting, we can’t see that object.

Now, what is it that keeps all these stars together? We might say gravity. *Gravity* is a word that in many ways means “we don’t know.” Gravity is like the ether that was once supposed to be the fluid through which light was transmitted but was later discovered not to exist because light could somehow do without it. It could go through nothing, through apparently empty space. It’s marvelous, really. So, here in our galaxy are all sorts of things that are not joined to each other by strings, and yet they constitute what we call a thing. And similarly, when we got down to the level of our own atomic structure, we see that we are like galaxies, with the atoms of our bodies vastly distant from each other like stars. But don’t ask what holds us together; that is the wrong question. What matters is our form.

When I see you, and then meet you again some-time later, how do I know it’s you? I know because I recognize your shape. If I haven’t seen you for a few years, when I meet you the second time there is very little of you that I knew before. Almost all of your so-called substance has changed. If I visit a waterfall a few seconds later, it is not the same waterfall. It is falling the same way, in the same style, but the water is all new. So, in the same way, when I meet you today, you have the same pattern, even though all your atoms may be new. Therefore, it is the pattern that matters.

If you look at a newspaper photograph under a magnifying glass, you will discover that what had once appeared to the naked eye as a clear picture now seems to be a series of dots. The dots are all alike, they form no apparent pattern, and there are no strings joining them. But if you change your level of magnification, and step away from it, suddenly there is a picture.

Now, you can magnify time as well as space. To magnify something in time you would speed it up and

## CHAPTER ONE

make a fast motion picture of it. If you put a seed in the earth and expose one frame of a motion picture per day, when you run that movie you will suddenly see the seed moving. You will see it put out a little feeler, and the feeler will grow, and suddenly the stalks and leaves will open out from it. Then up will come a plant. Let us suppose we could look at thousands and thousands of people in this same manner. We'd see little fetus cells turning rapidly into baby faces, into children, adolescents, adults, old people, and then, finally, into skulls and bones and dust. Face after face, just coming and going through the whole span of life, over and over again.

In watching all this we would begin to see the emergence of patterns and continuities that move much too slowly or are much too complex to be seen normally. But stand off at a distance, as it were, "magnify" time, and you would see the same rhythms occurring again and again. They would form a continuity connecting apparently unconnected lives. To use naive language, they would be what we might call the reincarnation of forms. This reincarnation would happen again and again and again, but with no "spook" traveling from one happening to the next. That would not be necessary, any more than it is necessary to have a line joining one dot in a newspaper photograph with another in order for them to form a coherent picture.

Do you know that when you watch television, you are actually watching a moving dot? It moves so fast that it creates the television image in your mind all by itself. However, suppose you had a different kind of eye altogether, one without memory. In that case you would look at the television screen and see nothing but a dot racing across it, and no trace of a picture at all. You would say that it doesn't make any sense, but when seen

in another way, of course, it makes perfect sense: it creates a picture. Mysteries, like reincarnation, therefore, don't require anything mystical to be understood. They can be understood by "magnifying" time by stepping back from the disconnected dots of life and seeing the whole picture. From that position, reincarnation is understandable in terms of a recurrence of life's complex forms and patterns.

The real world is right out there in front of you, and inside you. And you will discover that I can't tell you a thing you didn't already know.



# PHILOSOPHY OF THE TAO II

---

## CHAPTER TWO

**P**reviously I wrote about the three basic principles of Taoist philosophy, namely, Tao itself, the course of nature; wu wei, not forcing, the watercourse character of the course of nature; and *te*, the seeming magical power that comes of following the watercourse way and taking the line of least resistance.

Following the watercourse way argues always for a high order of intelligence, for it is more intelligent to sail a boat than to row it, even though sailing is a lazier way of doing it. Technologically it is easier to use the wind than to work against it, but in the West we haven't really awakened to the fact that it would be much more

## CHAPTER TWO

intelligent for us to use the sun, the wind, and the tides as sources of energy rather than using fossil fuels. And so we live in a state of foolish ignorance.

To understand anything about the philosophy of the Tao, you really need to be in a state of wise ignorance. I am often cast among people who are frantically conceptualizing and defending their frameworks of conceptualization, who have very fixed, elaborate theories of the nature of the universe and of man's destiny in it, and of the way to fulfillment. These conceptions are very ambitious, but once people enter into the framework of conceptualization, they become increasingly abstracted from the natural world, and they start living in books rather than in life, or in the movies rather than with people.

When you enter into the world of conceptualization, you begin to fall into the fundamental fallacy of civilization, which is to value the world of symbol above the world that the symbol represents. In our culture we have taken this to the wildest extremes, so that legally you don't exist unless you possess a birth certificate or a passport, which of course are nothing but pieces of paper. For us, the record of what has happened is far more important than what is actually happening, and therefore we waste incalculable energy on recording trivia and filling out income tax forms. In our universities we are anxious that the registrar's records are properly protected, but the books in the library can be damaged or stolen at will.

In the same way, a lot of people don't believe that they are real unless they can read about themselves in the newspaper, and many people feel uncomfortable if something fantastic occurs and nobody is there with a camera to take a picture of it. And so some children commit crimes to get their names in the newspaper so

that they will know they are there, because their parents are always using appearance in the newspaper as a standard of importance. Obviously, the message is that you are not important unless you, too, appear in the newspaper, in the record to go down in history.

We are making records, on film and tape, of what we call vanishing civilizations, vanishing cultures, vanishing arts, and vanishing species. And we seem to think it's all right, it can go ahead and vanish, just so long as we have them on record. It is all right if there aren't any whales or condors now, just so long as you can read about them in the Encyclopedia Britannica!

This confusion of the world of representations with the world of nature is just disastrous. Therefore it is tremendously important for us to get back to the world of nature. However, you may have a concept that the physical world, the world of nature, is unspiritual. A lot of people do, and similarly, a lot of people are at odds with their bodies. But what they are at odds with, really, is not their bodies but their *ideas* of their bodies. A lot of people resent change. They resent the idea of the dissolution process that is involved in physical change, and the idea that as you get older, from a conceptual point of view, you get uglier. However, that just isn't true. If they are alive and alert, old people are not ugly at all by virtue of just being old. But unfortunately, we have very, very rigid concepts of what is beautiful and what is not. It is important to abandon those ideas, at least occasionally, in order to see clearly. You can always take them up again later if you want, but it's good to stop thinking about them for a while. For if you think all the time, it is much like talking all the time. And although I may seem to be a very talkative person, I assure you that I am also a good listener. The minute somebody says something interesting, I am very silent and attentive. If I talk all the

## CHAPTER TWO

time, I won't hear the interesting things someone else may have to say, and likewise, if I think all the time, I won't have anything to think about except my own thoughts. Now, that would leave me high and dry, and I would become like a library to which the only books being added were books about the books that were already in it. It would be as if a painter never saw anything but art galleries or a musician heard nothing but concerts. Through these self-imposed limitations, we are falling out of touch and are unable to be with the world that is naturally with us.

Lao-tzu said, "The five colors make a man blind. The five tones make a man deaf." This means that if you think there are only five colors, you are blind, and if you think there are only five tones, you are deaf. There is, as you know, an infinite continuum of sound and color, and the spectrum is merely a matter of convenience in classification.

When in ancient texts of mysticism you read that it is necessary to go beyond the senses, that necessity can very easily be misunderstood. The texts are not saying that it is the senses—the eyes, the ears, and so on—that falsify. It is our conceptions of what the eyes and the ears bring to us that cause the falsification. In other words, it is not the precept but the concept wherein we find the root of maya—illusion—and magic. Of course, you can use conceptualization creatively, if you know what you are doing, but if you don't know what you are doing, your concept of reality can completely delude you. To escape that delusion, you must begin again to be generally aware of yourself and your surroundings without taking seriously any idea whatsoever about them, and without using particular words. You see?

I am using words, of course, but for the time being follow them as if they had no meaning, as if I were just

making nonsense. Now, in that marvelous state of ignorance, there is nothing called time, nothing called space, nothing called self, and nothing called “the other.” There is just the happening, and the happening is not supposed to be anything in particular. Whatever state of feeling you find yourself in, that is the way it is going, and you have no standards for criticizing it, for approving of it or disapproving of it. It is quite simply what there is, and sometimes it is just delightful to simply sit and be there. Of course, in the fancy world, sitting and being there is called meditation.

It is awfully important that we know what we are talking about, and not only can I tell you about Tao but I can also show it to you, and meditation is the way to show it. It is extraordinarily simple, but because of our concepts, it is difficult to understand. Our minds are caught up in two questions: Why are we doing it, and what is the use of it?

It is amazing how we are conditioned to turn everything into profit, and to feel guilty if we do not, and that is a very dangerous idea to impose on children. We all have a kind of conscience instilled in us—I call it the commercial conscience—that asks, “In what way is this bettering your situation?” If not financially, are you bettering your mind, or becoming more spiritual—whatever that is. However, we don’t really understand that we cannot be in a state of what could truly be called meditation, or contemplation, as I prefer, if we are seeking that state for some purpose or profit, or in the expectation that some kind of result or benefit might flow from it. The moment you have those desires or expectations, you are no longer in a state of meditation, you are bothered about concepts instead. Meditation is the one activity, or the one science, as it were, that has no goal in the sense of seeking an objective for the future.

## CHAPTER TWO

The stream begins in the mountains and runs down to the ocean. We are apt to say that the stream has the ocean as its goal, but when it gets to the ocean, the water is evaporated by the sun's heat and returns to the mountains. And then it comes down again. It has no desire to reach the ocean. Indeed, the stream is simultaneously in the sky, in the mountains, on its course, and in the ocean. It is in all places at once, and therefore it is not going anywhere, it is simply *going*.

When a Zen master was asked, "What is Tao?" he replied, "Walk on." And really, nothing will top that. One cannot not walk on. The flow is there, whether or not you resist it. When you resist it, though, you are like somebody swimming against the current, and that is a good way to drown. The skill of it, as in sailing, lies in going intelligently with the current, steering with it and using it. But it bothers us, especially if we are Western industrial people, to encounter a philosophy of no purpose or future objective. When we say of something "It has no future," that is equivalent to saying it is bad. But the word *purpose* and the word *meaning* can be used in different ways. Often when we speak of a meaningless life or a purposeless life, in a negative, derogatory way, we are actually referring to a person who lives life for extremely short-term purposes.

Short-term goals produce the same sort of restlessness that is encouraged in you when you turn over the pages of a glossy "news" magazine. You soon realize that a magazine of that character is really designed to keep you away from any sort of serenity. No article in it is satisfactory, in the sense of giving you anything to chew on, and it ends too soon. It gives you just a glimpse here and a peek there, but it never goes into anything deeply. It gives you a set of impressions, and it gives you pictures that are exciting or sensational or unusual,

which momentarily entertain you. You can go through a whole issue and remember nothing, but it keeps you in a state of the kind of pacified agitation you might want while you are flying on an airplane or waiting in an office or thumbing through something before breakfast. This kind of agitation is characteristic of a person who lives for short-term purposes. And doing that is what one would normally call a meaningless life. In contrast to that, a meaningful life is generally understood to be one devoted to long-term purposes, what we call serious matters. However, the Taoist standpoint is neither of these because a Taoist would probably have thought through the question of meaning very carefully and would have realized that there is something spurious about most of our purposes, whether long-term or short. When you look realistically at the state of human civilization, you see little more than people muddling through a mess. One might well ask, "What, then, are we talking about then when we talk about a meaningful life?" I think we should use a little more precision here than we usually employ in answering that question. In a very strict sense, words have meaning, but reality is meaning, and therefore it *has none*. The word, or the idea—which is a complex of words or other symbols—functions as a pointer to something other than itself. And that "other" is its meaning. So when you ask the question, "What do trees and rivers mean?" the answer is that they don't, because they are not words and they are not signs, unless you say, "A river is a sign of rain." This is a redundant statement because a river is rain draining from the land. The splendor of a river is that it *is* the meaning and *has none*, and there is about it a quality of meaninglessness, of having no meaning and yet being meaning to all nature.

Ludwig Wittgenstein makes the curious point that

there are people who, after long questing, feel that they understand the sense of life and yet nevertheless cannot say wherein that sense consists. If I experience something, whether it be a human being or some quality of light or a tree or a flower or a work of art that I find important, I might say it has tremendous meaning for me. And yet when asked what that meaning is, I am at a loss for words, because actually, in a very high sense, nature is non-sense. And in this way also, music is non-sense, especially classical music, whether it be the classical music of the West or of India or China, because all classical music is nonrepresentative. It is nonsymbolic, and it does not represent anything other than itself. It is a patterning of sound. It is like a fern, which is a vegetable patterning, or crystals, which are chemical patternings, or like animals, with all their marvelous routines.

When we look at the routines of the animals and the plants, we with our purposive minds say that all this is for the purpose of survival. But for the survival of what? If we have already defined the entire organism in terms of its survival, then all the plants can be shown to have as their purpose is the survival process. In the end, the survival process has as its fundamental purpose nothing other than the continuation of the survival process. So, in saying that a plant's purpose is survival, nothing has been said. It is a tautological statement. We are going on, so as to go on.

I would call this an engineering approach to nature. It looks at nature purely from the standpoint of efficiency. The engineer has no interest in inefficient processes. If I wanted to go from here to there, the engineer would direct me to take the shortest possible route so as to complete the journey in the shortest possible time. That would be the efficient way to go about it: by

taking a straight route rather than a wiggly one. But one takes a wiggly route not only to better fit one's path to the contours of the land but also just for the pleasure of winding along and enjoying the ride. Enjoyment of winding and wiggling is really fundamental to life. Life is wiggly, and it isn't wiggly just because that is the easiest way to be. It is wiggly for the pure love and beauty of wiggling.

Shirts covered with interesting floral wiggles somehow please the eye and are restful, whereas geometric surfaces and straight lines are not often restful, unless handled very skillfully. But in a floral setting, the eye can wander. Of course, one can overdo this sort of thing, the way Victorian wallpaper does, which becomes too much, used repetitively.

The Japanese do this kind of arrangement very skillfully, however, by using emptiness and displaying against it a very clear wiggle—as in a flower arrangement or a calligraphic painting. So arranged, the space and the wiggle complement each other.

When people run, those with an engineering mentality go jogging; they plod, chunking along a course. Those who really understand running, however, dance the course. They will swerve and run delightfully on their toes, and they are really more effective runners than joggers are because they wind along in a rhythmic pattern and do not have “getting there” in mind. They are not just exercising out of a sense of duty. And as they run they have no real particular purpose.

If you travel with a destination in mind, your whole journey will become a chore. That is why, when you are traveling in a car, or by any other means, you wear yourself out in your hurry to get somewhere. You arrive absolutely exhausted, because all along you have been pushing it, and there was no need to. You would be

## CHAPTER TWO

amazed to see how astonishingly soon you seem to arrive if you were to set out to go somewhere in no hurry. But if you set out in a hurry, it will take forever to get there.

In becoming acquainted with the Chinese and the Japanese appreciation of natural form—which is derived essentially from Taoism and secondarily from Zen, which is Buddhism as influenced by Taoism—you find that what characterizes their whole approach to art is the purposelessness of nature. In religious art, one usually finds paintings and sculptures of very symbolic figures. These figures are normally symmetrical, but what you find in the Taoist and the Zen feeling for nature is that the focal point of reverence, of fascination, will be the unsymmetrical. The focus could be a rock of peculiar shape that has been set in space in a certain way, but the rock is not intended to have any symbolic meaning whatsoever.

The same sense is also apparent in Zen stories. When somebody in a Zen story asks for the fundamental meaning of Buddhism, the master is likely to answer, “I didn’t feel like wearing shoes today.” I know very well that ignorant people will look for symbolism in this and will treat this answer as some sort of allegorical performance. But that is not the meaning of it at all, and this is not the sense of a Zen remark.

You cannot understand the sense of the Zen remark without being rather stupid. That is to say, by taking it simply, for what it is. In the anecdote I just recounted, the master wasn’t talking about not wearing shoes. Neither was he speaking symbolically to lead you around through symbols that are a kind of code known only to the initiates. What would be the point in that? The master was talking quite simply and directly about the Tao, and that is also the fundamental meaning of

Buddhism. It is the happening, the universe. Get with it. How can you not?

So, those Zen stories and Chinese and Japanese works of art give the feeling of the Tao. A favorite scene is of a mountain landscape, with a tiny little human figure in it somewhere, a poet wandering through pine trees beside a stream. Where is he going? Where is the stream going? Where are the clouds going? Where are the birds going? We don't know, really. They are wandering on. And so, within this idea of wandering you can discover the quality that the Japanese call *yugen*. *Yugen* is made up of two characters that mean "mysterious" and "deep." In Japanese poetry *yugen* is what you feel when you watch wild geese and they are suddenly hidden by a cloud. It is what you feel when you are looking at ships far out to sea and they slowly sail behind a far-off island. *Yugen* is to wander on and on in a great forest without thought of return.

Now, you get a certain kind of feeling from these poetical expressions. As Porgy sang in *Porgy and Bess*, "I got plenty of nothing, and nothing's plenty for me." See? This is the same sort of idea. One Chinese poem starts out "My thoughts will wander in the great void." This is *yugen*. *Yugen*, therefore, is the sensation of life, of nature, of going, but going nowhere. But it is not the sort of nowhere that we imagine when we see a sign that says NO THROUGH ROAD or when we come to a blank wall. Going nowhere is going into pregnant space. We do not know, as it were, what will come of it. It is to use space in such a way that our imagination just flows into it without taking on any specific forms. It is like when a certain kind of music hints at something but doesn't spoil its subtlety by explaining it. And it is like a joke, for a joke is funny only as long as it is not explained. Do not even explain to yourself why you laugh, because

even that would spoil it. In the same way there is this mysterious quality to *yugen* that is not defined but that you understand and see the beauty of just as you see the humor in a joke without defining it. That is why, incidentally, there is no adequate philosophy of humor, and certainly no funny philosophy of humor. A lot of philosophers and psychologists have written about the psychology of laughter in an extremely boring way. And in a similar way, it is futile to discuss aesthetics in a philosophical or practical manner, as if trying to find out the formula for creating a beautiful object.

Japanese and Chinese poets repeatedly bring up images that evoke the marvel of purposelessness. Let me give you an illustration. In Japan and in China they love building temples on the sides of mountains, and especially forested mountains. Trees called *cryptomeria* that are very much like *sequoia* grow in Japan, and they grow in vast, cathedral-like forests on the sides of mountains. Well, in Japan you will frequently see at the bottom of such a mountain a great gate opening into a *cryptomeria* forest. The gate will have all kinds of ornate carvings on it in the style of the ancient T'ang dynasty of China, which is the style of Japanese temple architecture. There will be clouds and dragons and *upsara* girls and all sorts of wonders carved in this gate.

When you go through it, there will be a grand set of stone steps flanked by guardian dogs and bronze lanterns. It is a marvelous approach, and at the top of the steps there will be another such gate. There may be great sliding doors in it. And when you go beyond that, there may be a courtyard surrounded by maple trees in front of the *cryptomerias*, and there will be the temple, a splendid, great building. If you go inside it you will find a marvelous golden altar with Buddhas around it and incense and golden lotus flowers and candles. It is all

very splendid, and there the Buddha will be sitting on his lotus throne, smiling down at you.

Well, these shrines are arranged so that, somehow or other, you will next find yourself behind the temple. And low and behold, there will be another flight of steps, perhaps not quite so grand as the preceding staircases, but leading up and away and deeper into the forest. And if you climb those stairs, you will come at last to a different kind of temple. It may be a Shinto shrine, and it will be very simply constructed. Or it might be the hermitage, the personal house of the chief priest of the temple. Buddhism grew up in the fertile soil of Taoism in China and Shinto in Japan, and often the temples were built on the same sites. So, the gate to this temple or hermitage will be rustic, and there may be a small garden around it, and a garden path that will lead to a further ascent of steps beyond it. And if you go up those steps, you will finally find a graveyard among the trees.

Here you will not find the kind of ugly tombstones Westerners tend to use, however. Instead there will be simple square wooden pillars with the names of the deceased written in characters. And the sense of that graveyard is not quite as depressing as we are used to because it gives one the feeling that everything simply flows away. And right at the back of the graveyard there will be another small shrine. It will draw you in, and when you get to it you will look inside. And what will you find there, in that place of honor? A mirror.

And then, oh my goodness, there will be still another flight of steps going up. It will be nothing more than a very crude, narrow trail rising up yet higher into the trees. And if you follow it, it suddenly vanishes into the bushes. And a haiku poem says, "This is all there is. The path comes to an end among the parsley."

Do you remember that as a child? When you

## CHAPTER TWO

explored a garden, you looked at things from close to the ground. Unable to look over the tops of things like an adult, you just explored a little way around, through the bushes. And there was a little trail that finally just vanished into what might very well have been the parsley? I so vividly remember that, and how magical it was. I felt I could disappear at that point and never be discovered. I felt, too, that there were all sorts of secrets hidden in those bushes. I never specified what they were, though. That would have ruined the feeling.

We cannot conceive of the real thing that we want; it would spoil everything to do so, because it would then become a mere conception. What we are seeking is the great surprise, and to the degree that we preconceive it, it will fall flat. The whole principle of the universe is surprise, and so the Tao's principle is spontaneity and surprise. It is to accomplish a miracle without doing anything, without planning it. You will see here a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a coincidence of opposites, as in, for example, the relationship between doing and happening, or between freedom and necessity. And you can see that, because you can't visualize one without the other, all process can be understood as being simultaneously free and necessary. That is a contradiction in ordinary logic, in ordinary forms of conception. But when we say of something that it happens necessarily, we are separating the happening from its cause, and that is a purely conceptual separation. Strictly speaking, everything that happens is part of the same event as its cause. As I demonstrated earlier, for instance, river, ocean, and rain are all one event. You can't say that a river is caused by its source. And if it were not flowing, there would be no water in the ocean to be evaporated and returned to the river as rain.

You look at the Tao, and from one point of view,

you can see that it is free. That is to say, it is emerging from the void quite freely, quite spontaneously. But when you look at it from another point of view, you can see that everything that happens, happens *necessarily*. Actually, the truth is neither one view nor the other. Those views are just different ways of classifying, of looking at it and chopping it up.

If I have a magnet and I start at its north pole, chopping, cutting off sections, approaching the south pole, every piece that I cut off will have a north pole. And the original magnet will still have a north pole too, all the way until I get right to the end and the whole magnet has been chopped up and disappears. And if I begin from the south pole, every time I chop, getting closer to the north, the original magnet will still have a south pole.

In the same way, if you approach the world from the end called necessity and you start chopping, chopping, chopping to get to the end called freedom, it will always be necessity that you will find, right up to the end. You will see that everything that is happening is happening *necessarily*. But then, if you turn around and begin at the end of the world called freedom and start chopping away, it will always be freedom that you will find, until you get to necessity, at which point everything will disappear. It is for this reason, then, that the poet—who next to the musician speaks most eloquently about the Tao—doesn't philosophize. The poet merely provides us with an image: this is all there is, the path comes to an end in the parsley.

And one could say, enough said.



# THE WORLD AS ORGANIC PROCESS

---

## CHAPTER THREE

**T**he *Book of Changes* is based on sixty-four unique six-line symbols known as hexagrams. Two kinds of lines form these hexagrams: solid yang lines and broken yin lines. These two types of lines can be grouped into a total of eight different three-line figures, which are known as trigrams, and which represent an intermediary step between basic yin or yang lines and the final six-line hexagram. The names of these trigrams are Heaven, Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, Mountain, Thunder, and Lake. These eight trigrams can be grouped, in turn, into the sixty-four two-trigram parts that, to return us to the beginning, are the sixty-four hexagrams of the *I Ching*,

or the *Book of Changes*. For the Chinese, these sixty-four different pairings of the eight different trigrams represent the elements or the forms of life.

The quality of any given moment or situation can be represented by a hexagram generated during that moment or situation. There are various methods, using coins or sticks, for arriving at a situation's representative hexagram, and many people using these techniques employ the *Book of Changes* as a book of divination. Now, I have seen a Zen priest look at flowers arranged in a bowl and then say to the person who had arranged them, "Ah yes. You were in a melancholy mood at the time you did that." He was somehow able to interpret the quality of the mood, in the moment the flowers had been arranged, by the pattern of their grouping.

In the *Book of Changes*, each hexagram is also accompanied by an interpretation. However, you know how oracles are: sometimes the things they say are very specific, and sometimes they are so vague that you can project anything you want onto them, in much the same way that one can project a story or a picture onto a Rorschach blot. But the *I Ching* has a very peculiar quality, and one that is very difficult to pin down. It is like having a conversation with a great sage, especially when you turn to it with a specific problem in mind.

Now, there is an old Western custom of opening the Bible at random and picking out a verse to see what it tells you, and this is called bibliomancy. Consulting the *I Ching* is a somewhat more complex activity than that, and it is pursued by some very sophisticated people. One reason for its effectiveness is that coming to a firm decision is better, for almost all purposes, than coming to a weak decision. And also, since the information available to us about any particular decision is extraordinarily incomplete, since you could not possibly have complete knowledge of any situation, it is sometimes

enormously effective to make decisions at random. This raises the question that is implicit in all discussions about noninterference, or *wu wei*. It raises the great question of the difference between the artificial and the natural, which is absolutely central to Taoist attitudes—and later, to Zen—and which lies strongly in the background of Chinese life.

One might, of course, say that a distinction between the artificial and the natural is itself an artificial distinction. If bees' nests are natural, for instance, so are human buildings. Therefore, what on earth do we mean by the word nature? How do the Chinese use this word, and how do we use it? Let us look first at how we use it. We do so in at least two ways. The most common use, aside from a general notion of nature's being something that is undisturbed by man, is when we ask, "What is the nature of this thing?"

When we ask about something's nature, we are usually after its classification: is it animal, vegetable, or mineral? Therefore, all the early Western treatises on nature, such works as John Scotus Erigena's *De divisione naturae*, were concerned with the divisions or categories of nature. After his work came books on natural history, and the main thing they taught was how to classify the various kinds of creatures of the bestiary. The Middle Ages was a time devoted to the classification of the creatures of the world, and later on Western studies of natural history tell us what families all the various fishes and birds and moths and butterflies and flowers and trees belong to. In this context the word *nature* refers to classification according to type, kind, or family. However, this use of *nature* is based on its earlier meaning, which is derived from the idea that everything in the world behaves according to its nature. In this sense of the word, there are different varieties of natures, and they are connected to the Latin *natura*, which means

“birth,” and are related to our word *nativity*. Therefore, when you are born, you have a certain nature, which has been given to you by God. In the beginning, God said, “‘Come, *hum*, be my bee, and buzz as I bid.’ And sure enough, it was, and it did.” God, in the beginning, is supposed to have established the nature of all things, and to have laid down the laws for their behavior. Therefore, this idea of natural law lies at the basis of the Western idea of nature.

The Western idea of nature also included the notion that there was, in the beginning, a lawgiver who conceived of an ideal plan for the universe. This plan was called the Logos, or the Word, which in Christianity is the second person of the Holy Trinity, that element of the divine nature which, according to Christian theology, is supposed to have been incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is said in the Christian creed that one believes in “one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. God of God, light of light, true God of true God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.”

However, people don’t usually understand this concept. They think it is the Father by whom all things were made, but no, it is not. It is the Son, the Word, by whom all things were made.

To put it another way, the law—the ideal pattern of the universe—is the actual creative agent in Christian philosophy. This leads to our idea of the law of nature as being, as it were, the supernatural rail upon which the cosmic streetcars are forever to run. And so, there is the idea that “all flesh is grass, but surely the word of the Lord abideth forever.” So, to act according to nature means to act according to the laws that the Lord God has laid down for every particular species and for every

particular member of that species. But of course, this idea gives rise to the possibility of being unnatural, of behaving unnaturally, of breaking the law of nature, and of doing things that you were never supposed to do. So in this way, the West has the thought that one can be unnatural, and that you can break the laws of nature.

Now, the Chinese also have the conception of people acting in an unnatural way, and there is a long discussion of this in the inner chapters of the Chuang-tzu book. He describes the pure men of old, who made no plans for the future, who were affectionate without knowing that they were being loving, and who were faithful without calling it loyalty. He describes the way they lived and how they went about in the world. They were never in a hurry, they just strolled around, and it was a fine life. Nobody had a thought about anything. There were no police, no laws, and nobody ever talked about virtue or anything like that. Then the great Tao was lost, and the idea of duty came to man, and the idea of right conduct.

The point of Chuang-tzu's story is that the decisions and the planning we do might just as well be left to the Tao, just as the cats and birds appear to leave everything to the Tao. But we argue, "Well, we can foretell the future and make plans, and therefore we can control our lives better than the animals can, and survive longer, as individuals. We can live more elegantly, and we have greater control." However, we pay a price for all that control, and the price is anxiety. The more we learn about the future, so as to be able to control it, the more we worry about it. We lie awake nights thinking, "Did I do the right thing? Did I take everything into consideration? Will it work out?" If you feel poor, for example, and you don't have enough money, and then if you get enough money so that you don't have to worry about bills anymore, you will probably start worrying about

something else. “Will I get sick? Will I be involved in an accident? Will the police come after me?” You know, it could be anything, but if you are an anxious person you are going to be anxious about something, come what may.

There are people, of course, who throw all this off and say, “To hell with the whole thing. I’m not going to bother about all this stuff anymore.” Incidentally, it is very difficult to be one of those people because of other people who think they are important. Since they are making all their plans, they start pushing you around, and they say, “Come on, you have to join our game. You can’t be outside our game, or else you have to go away.” They may put you in jail, and of course, in jail you don’t have to make any plans. You don’t have to make any decisions at all because you just do what you are told. So, this is one way to stop making plans, but it is kind of depressing.

Taoism, as practiced in China, is adopted by older men or women who say, “Well, all right, the young can take over in this game that we’ve been playing.” They can take off and live in the mountains. And so the Chinese have created a huge romance about the Old Man of the Mountain. One of their lovely poems is called “Inquiring for the Master”:

*I asked a boy beneath the pines.  
He said the master’s gone alone,  
herb-gathering,  
somewhere on the mount.  
Cloud-hidden, whereabouts unknown.*

Now, this idea of going back into the mountain is comparable to the Hindu idea that after being a householder, you should go on to the *vanaprastha* state and leave society and become a forest dweller. This is the

same idea, except that the Chinese have romanticized it more than the Hindus have. The poet Han-shan—his name means “cold mountain”—has composed absolutely marvelous expressions of this idea of going off to the floating life, to a life of drifting like a cloud and flowing like water. The mood associated with this idea is one of the components of what the Japanese call *yugen*. We have no translation for that word, but one senses it in the feeling one would have if one were wandering on and on in a great forest without thought of return.

There is another Chinese poem that starts out with the line, “My thoughts shall wander in the great void.” And so the Old Man in the Mountain owns nothing, and nothing owns him. Or, to put it another way, he has nothing but possesses all things. “The beggar,” says another poem, “has heaven and earth for his summer clothes.”

To become an Old Man of the Mountain is to carry out the ideal of being natural in a very literal sort of way. The idea that one should actually go back to the forest, should actually give up concern about “what you shall eat and what you shall drink, and wherewithal you shall be clothed” is the most subversive and supposedly impractical passage in the Bible. But, given a certain toughness of muscle and hardness of health, this can be done by any human being.

After all, if you live that way and stop planning and prognosticating, all you are doing is ceasing to build up a huge edifice on which you have got to make house payments, and all that jazz. Because, you see, once you get involved in that game, and start acquiring things, everybody starts trying to pick them away from you: with a little pick here, a little pick there, here a pick, there a pick, everywhere a pick, pick. So, you must watch out for that kind of trap, or else you will have to

hire people to help you watch out for it. But if you are doing that, you are probably also developing ulcers and getting gray hair while sorting out these difficulties, and it's probably not working for you. So, you can go back to the natural life, where even death is no problem, because when you die, you'll just die. You will just go, and instead of worrying about what it will be like afterward, you just go along. If there is an accident, and you have not made the proper plans, then, whoops, it's all finished. But you see, it's better to have one day without anxiety than thousands of days filled with anxiety.

Now, that is the philosophy of nature according to Lao-tzu; however, certain things must be remembered. The first one is that Taoists in general, and Chuang-tzu in particular, are given to exaggeration in their writings, and you may have come across this. In our culture it is very commonplace for a group of people who have a certain set of ideas to get together, and after a few drinks they begin to exaggerate their own philosophy, knowing very well that they are exaggerating it. I have heard, for example, among the clergy, when they get together, all sorts of amazing schemes come forth. For example, Roman Catholic priests wear *birettas*—black hats with bladelike things on them and a pom-pom on top. One priest I knew was going to hang a biretta in his pulpit and put a set of false teeth under it that would open and close while a recorded sermon was being delivered.

And in this same way of spoofing the thing you are supposed to hold important and sacred, Chuang-tzu spoofs us about the idealized principles of Taoism. The things he says are very, very exaggerated, and you always have to allow for that when reading Taoist texts. When they want to describe the person who is perfectly natural, they depict him as somebody with a long beard who is absolutely unwashed, who does nothing whatever,

but just sits around, opening his mouth when it rains and getting a drink that way. But that's an exaggeration, and this image is largely symbolic.

The best creation of this sort is a character called Pu-tai in Chinese, and Hotei in Japanese. He is immensely fat, and he carries a long staff. He has a huge bag in which he collects things that have been discarded and are unimportant, and he gives them to children. This is the happy old rogue of Taoist legends. Of course, he is an exaggeration, but he humorously makes his point.

Now, if it is true that the Tao is that from which nothing can deviate, then it is also true that the distinction between the artificial and the natural is an artificial distinction. Therefore it is possible to live a life of business or raising children and still be like Hotei/Pu-tai. It is possible to live a natural life, but to do this requires some unconventional wisdom.

Consider that if all objects of art are essentially natural, like bees' nests, what is it that allows us to say that one work of art is more natural than another? If everything a human does is natural, what allows us to say that one kind of life is more natural than another?

Remember that we understand words by means of their contrast with other words. We understand *black* by means of its contrast with *white*, *one* by contrast with *many*, and so on. The Hindus needed a word for that which transcended all differentiations and contrasts. Instead of calling this transcendental thing "the one," they called it the nondual, with the understanding that, although this word has a logical opposite—namely dual—they were going to use it as if it had no opposite. This understanding is a social convention. In much the same way, we have a social convention with regard to the artistic depiction of perspective. We use lines in such a way that even though they are drawn on a flat surface,

## CHAPTER THREE

we interpret them as being drawn with the dimension of depth.

In exactly the same way, although everything is natural, there are certain conventions of art that are understood by the culture to be more natural than others, or to more fully represent the spontaneous spirit. This idea comes from two fundamental Taoist notions, which are called the uncarved block and the unbleached silk. Now, a shirt made of unbleached silk has a nice kind of texture, like unbleached muslin. It has a kind of rough elegance to it. There is an art in Japan called *bonseki*, which means “the cultivation of rocks,” and this implies the appreciation of rocks with a rough elegance to them. To pursue the art of bonseki means to go out and find a rock that looks more like a rock than other rocks.

Now, I have been talking about the Chinese idea of nature; however, the Chinese don't conceive of nature as following laws. Nevertheless, they do apprehend in it a principle of order that they call *wu tze*, that is to say, “Without law and yet orderly.” And I have tried to suggest various ways in which we too can somehow apprehend this order. I use the word *apprehend* rather than *comprehend* advisedly. We can understand what the Chinese mean by order through their concept of *li*, which originally meant the markings in jade, the grain in wood, and the fiber in muscle. But the principle of order in nature, and the organic patterns in which nature plays, are never able to be completely reproduced in mechanical terms. Yet just such reproductions of the patterns of physical nature in mechanical terms are how our Western forefathers defined *explanation*. Unless you could explain something in those mechanical terms, well, you hadn't really explained it. And so, too, in the whole academic world of the West, that which cannot be writ-

ten down and discussed in an accurate way is not matter for academic learning. This is a very limited point of view, because the world that can be described is never the same as the world that exists. The described world and the real world are incommensurable, and one must never lose sight of that fact, because you start eating the menu instead of the dinner and swallowing the money instead of the food it can buy. Yet people characteristically do just that. And therefore, the people who have been hypnotized and bewitched by words have to be dehypnotized and brought back to the world in which we live.

Now, we call the world in which we live the physical world, or the material world, and that bugs people who are what I call spiritual types. They want to find behind the material world—which changes and perishes—a spiritual world that is more real and endures forever. But they are often fouled up because their thoughts about the two worlds are exactly backward. It's the material world that is a world of pure abstraction. The physical world, as we use that phrase, is a completely abstract creation. It is not concrete at all.

That may surprise you, but a little investigation into the origin of words will show you conclusively that this is so. Question: How does a scientist treat what he calls the material world? Answer: By quantitative methods. How do you establish quantity? By measure, by number, which is to say, by representing nature in terms of abstract categories—meters, inches, seconds, degrees, and so on—all of which are exactly as abstract as the lines of latitude and longitude on a globe. And the word *meter*—as in the metered world, the measured or measurable world—derives from the Sanskrit word *matra*, the root from which also *maya*, or illusion, is derived.

I have said that one of the great meanings of

*nature* in the West is “classification”: “What is the nature of this thing?” In Greek, *physis*—from which comes our *physics*—has to do with the world as apprehended in a certain way: the world as apprehended according to its classes, and those classes are abstract. When we say of something, “It is immaterial,” “It doesn’t matter,” that means it has no quantitative measure. It doesn’t amount to anything; it doesn’t add up to anything. It is unquantified. But what we need in life is not so much quantity as quality. Mere quantity is absolutely abstract. It’s the quality, the essential taste, the flavor of life, the meaning of it, that is the important thing.

There are ways of measuring qualities, but in our language you always have to turn them into quantities. When a cook, standing over a stewpot, adds salt, takes a taste, puts in a little more, tastes again, and then says, “Now that’s just right,” we can have somebody stand behind him and record the actual quantity of salt added. And that would be the quantitative abstraction that corresponds to a taste experience that was not an abstraction at all. However, in order to bring people back to the real world, you have to temporarily suspend their abstract thinking, because it is through abstracting that you divide everything into differences. It is through abstracting that you get the notion that you are one thing and I am another, and that events are separate from each other, in the same way that minutes are separate. We try to draw the lines on our watches that separate one minute from another as finely as possible because we want to know exactly the moment one minute turns into another. And those lines, by their very thinness, show us how abstract, tenuous, filmy, and unreal they are. They are measures; but don’t confuse measure for what is measured. The world that can be seen and felt without abstractions is the world in which

you are connected to everything that is, to the Tao and the whole course of nature. However, you have been taught differently because you have been hoaxed and wangled by people who chatter and explain, and who have already hypnotized themselves into a view of the world that is quite abstract, quite arbitrary, and not necessarily the way things are at all.

So the Taoist, in common with the Hindus and the Buddhists, is a great advocate of intellectual silence. Mind you, one doesn't say that the intellect is a bad thing, or that one should be an anti-intellectual. Not at all. Thinking is just as much a part of the process of nature as a web woven by a spider is. The spider weaves the web to make a net for flies, and the mind weaves a net for catching the universe. And that is fine, but there is something more to the universe than the net made for catching it. But in order to find this something else, you must temporarily stop using the net, just as, if you want to hear what other people have to say, you have to stop talking. And if you want to talk, you must also know what you are talking about. In other words, if words represent the real world, then you must be open to the real world in order to translate it effectively into words. But we are not taught to do that. Most of us think compulsively all the time. That is to say, we carry on a perpetual interior conversation, because we are afraid that if that conversation were to cease, we too would cease. And, in a way, we would. So, the Taoists speak constantly of being thoughtless, of having an empty mind, so that one can communicate with the real world without distortion.

I have already pointed out that Taoists exaggerate things. They overstress the things they are talking about, and you must allow for that. And so, when they say that a certain wise man was so quiet and so still that moss

## CHAPTER THREE

grew over his body, animals crawled over him without noticing his presence, his breathing ceased altogether, and his heart no longer beat, they are using fanciful exaggeration and imagery. Nevertheless, there is quite definitely a Taoist yoga, and there are Taoist meditation practices, just as there are Buddhist forms of meditation.

The first element of Chinese Taoist yoga is to stop talking to oneself. Don't explain the world. This method is in direct conflict with the Confucians, who made a great point of what Confucius himself—K'ung Fu-tzu is his proper name—called the rectification of names, which was a way of being sure that the language was in order so that there wouldn't be any confusion. But the Taoists said, "How can you ever rectify names? You establish names by talking about them and you explain them by talking about them. How will you then explain the words you use to talk about them, and be sure they are fixed and in order?" As Lao-tzu says, "Naming is the mother of ten thousand things." He also says, "No name, the nameless, is the origin of heaven and earth." So one has to get to the nameless state, the nonthinking state, which is called in Chinese *wu nien*. *Wu* means "not" and *nien* means "the heart-mind." *Nien* is also translated as "remember." It is the equal to the Sanskrit word *shana*, and *shana* means "an atom of time," "a moment," "an instant." It means to see the world without dividing it into instants, to see it all as one instant, not many instants in a series.

Now, you will find, if you try, that it is a very difficult thing indeed to stop thinking. "Stopping thinking" doesn't mean to stop using your eyes and your ears and your hands and all your senses. It means that when you see a dog, you don't say "dog" to yourself; you just see what is there. The Buddhists call this the state of suchness.

Now, you see, if I hold a conversation with some-

body, they hear my words and they derive my meaning from those words. What is the meaning of that? What is the meaning of the fact that I can use words to convey something to someone else? It has no meaning at all. It is just something happening, as when flowers bloom like flowers and the water goes like water and the wind blows like the wind. I am writing and you are reading and some people are playing baseball and some are watching television and some are sailing boats and some are traveling in airplanes and some are riding on buses. It is like music. But what is the meaning of music? Some music is made to have a meaning, and it is what we call program music. But when music is simply music, it is simply going on.

This is marvelous. When the birds fly in the sky, why are they flying? When the wind is high, the gulls go way up in the air. Normally, gulls are supposed to be busy fishing and surviving and doing all those really important things. But when the wind is high, they all start floating up into the sky, because they just simply like to float on the wind. It is just something that happens, and when you begin to see the world in that way, then at once you begin to realize that it simply isn't important whether you succeed or fail. Those are arbitrary standards, imposed on the world in the same way we impose our other patterns and measures on it.

There is a lovely Chinese poem that says:

*In the spring scenery  
there is nothing superior,  
nothing inferior;  
flowering branches grow of themselves,  
some short, some long;  
the morning glory blooms for an hour  
and yet is no different from a giant pine  
that lives for a thousand years.*

## CHAPTER THREE

The essential thing is to be able to see everything thus, because this view is absolutely at the root of the Tao. And when you truly see everything thus, you fall silent.

Lao-tzu said, “Those who know do not say; those who say do not know.” And yet he wrote the *Tao Te Ching*. And what am I doing? I am saying but I am also not-saying. I am not trying to tell you something. I am not hoping you will get a message, in the ordinary sense, from my words. I am playing with words. When I speak I enjoy the sound of my own voice, and the sound of my voice is a great deal more important than what I am saying. Do you get that?

I have a friend who tries to make people listen, and while he is talking to them, trying to get them to listen, he says, “Now don’t try to attach any meaning to the sounds you hear; just hear them.”

In listening you would do the same thing with my words. You listen to the real world that’s outside them, and listening in that way is the entry into the real world where there are no distinctions, because all the distinctions are made by thinking. Nor is there, for that matter, any sameness. The universe is just the way it is. And that is the Tao, which can’t be spoken.

Now, you may ask, “How on earth does one learn to listen like that? Because I think compulsively, and I can’t stop thinking.” Well, first of all, don’t start by trying to banish thoughts from your mind. That, as the Taoists say, is like “beating a drum in search of a fugitive.” In the same way exactly, if you try to stop thinking, you end up thinking about stopping thinking, and that creates a great deal of confusion. What you have to do instead is let your mind think whatever it likes to think, but instead of paying attention to the meaning of the words within your thoughts, just become aware of

those words as sound. Hear everything that is said to you as a series of noises.

We can do this very easily while listening to music. When you really listen to music, you don't talk, you just go with the flow. And that is why listening to music is a form of meditation, especially music that doesn't make you think. Now, some people can't go with the flow. Music always stimulates ideas in them, and they will think about this and that, and not listen. But if you really listen to music, the sound of it becomes your whole mind.

It is more difficult to stop thinking while looking at something than when listening, because we think with our eyes to an amazing degree. But you can learn to look at something without interpreting what you are looking at. This doesn't mean that you don't see. You look, but you don't name. The world begins to be a very different place indeed when you look without naming, when you stop saying, "That's a head, that's a face, that's hair, that's a hand," because the moment you say, "That's a hand," you stop seeing the hand. But if you really look at a hand, and don't think about it, it becomes miraculous. You can't force nonthinking, though. You cannot force thoughts out of your mind. But if you simply listen to them in a new way, as if they were music, you will slowly begin to divest yourself of your interpretative system and its terminology and the value system within which, like a straitjacket, you have been brought up to live, and that will be your entry into the real world, the world of the Tao.



# BEING IN THE WAY I

---

## CHAPTER FOUR

One of the first things everyone should understand is that every creature in the universe that is in any manner of speaking conscious regards itself as a human being. That is to say, if a creature is sensitive, it knows and is aware of a hierarchy of beings above it and a hierarchy of beings below it. Even such a tiny creature as the fruit fly, which lives only a few days, is aware of all sorts of weird little animals and pollens and spores floating in the atmosphere that we don't even notice, unless we happen to be looking through a microscope. Indeed, the fruit fly may well criticize these spores and think they are inferior to it, and at the same time human beings are

incomprehensible, from its perspective, because we are as much outside its perceptual range as a quasar is outside ours. And actually, our universe may be inside an atom in somebody else's world, and all our galaxies may be part of the same speck of dust sitting on a giant piano.

The relativity of one's perspective is a fundamental principle that I think everybody must understand in order to know the meaning of the Tao, which is the Chinese sense of the course of nature. Wherever you are and whoever you are and whatever you are, you are in the middle. When you stand on the deck of a ship and you see the horizon all around you at exactly the same distance, you are in the center of a circle, and your senses extend a certain range in all directions and give you the impression of being in the middle. Everything in the world feels just like that! Also, everything feels itself to be at the center of its own kind, and they look natural to it. Spiders and hydras and sea urchins don't look very natural to us, and so we say, "I wouldn't want to look like that." But when they see us, they say, "Well, what kind of an awful thing is that? And what a lot of nonsense it does, too."

Dogs have tried to catch on to human beings in a sort of funny way, but cats look at us and think, "You are out of your mind. You are absolutely crazy. Why do you sit there all day feverishly pecking away at a typewriter when you could be curled up in the sun purring?" From the cat's point of view, we don't understand what life is about at all. All cats—and cats in cat company—feel that they are people because they are in the middle of their world. The true definition of a person is a place to look from, that is, the middle position. And of course, this is the point of the very interesting Buddhist idea that says that a person can only become a buddha—that is to say, a human being can only become enlightened,

liberated, aware of their unity with the universe—from the middle or human position. Therefore, Buddhism calls itself the Middle Way because it is the way for someone in the middle, and that is everyone. And believe it or not, there are forms of yoga and ways of liberation for worms, fruit flies, snails, spiders, birds, and everything else.

Every creature in its situation feels just as cultured as we can possibly feel. All creatures have their distinctions and their snobberies, just as we do, because, you see, they are aware of all sorts of things that we don't even notice. We think a person is cultured if they play the piano or the violin, or read poetry, have a big library or paintings, a fancy house, and so on. We say that this is truly a person of culture. We can see at once that this person is a rather elegant human being, but when you enter the world of fishes, they have exactly the same sort of thing going on. Only, instead of revealing their elegance by collecting books and things like that, they show it in the precise wiggles and very subtle tremors of the tail by which one fish reveals itself to be a very superior fish as compared with others, which makes all the other fish look at these wiggles and say, "Oh my, to be like that. What a genius! To be able to do that so well." And airplanes flying formation cannot even begin to do what flights of birds and schools of fish can do in their communal swirling dances.

Allow me to interject something rather important here. The nature of biological existence is such that we have to kill in order to live. Even vegetarians have no way out of this situation, because plants are also forms of life, and they are awake to a certain degree, and they also think they are people. When you chew up plants—cabbages and carrots and things like that—you are causing a very painful experience for them, and you can't get away from that. The only possible solution to the ethical

dilemma that we have to eat in order to live, that being is killing, is to revere food, to prepare it as well as possible, and to enjoy it to the fullest extent. There is no other ethical response possible in this situation. Remember that you are not the only pebble on the beach and that even human beings belong to mutual eating societies, just as much as fish and cows do, and that something in the end is going to eat you too. Of course, human beings are not, as a rule, eaten by large creatures because we have rid ourselves of things like lions and tigers. There are not many of those things around, and so instead we are eaten by tiny creatures, by the microorganisms. Our morticians are a very unreasonable group of people because they are trying to deprive all those microorganisms of their proper human food. When they preserve human bodies in formaldehyde and bury them in sealed bronze caskets instead of giving the worms a meal, those bodies just do nothing. They become more and more parchmentlike instead of continuing into the flow of the course of life, which is the proper thing to do when you die. To let the microorganisms eat us would be an act of respect for the earth from which we have gained all the years we were alive. To give ourselves back to the source of life is the courteous thing to do, and it would help keep the whole cycle going. So we should start a campaign at once to abolish the mortician's profession and replace it with a new system in which dead human beings would be buried in great fields and left there, so those fields would have the most fertile soil for growing corn and lettuce and artichokes and grapevines. In this way you go back into the cycle and become everything that is beautiful.

But now, to return to my main point, here is something that is very strange. For every creature that feels it is a person and knows that it is here in the same way

that you do, the experience of being here constitutes a sort of blockage. There are very few human beings who don't feel this, and I am sure there are very few other creatures that don't feel it in some way as well. It is the creation of a certain tension that constitutes the feeling of I-ness, of there-ness, of being here. After all, every creature is a particular form. Everything is individual, and that means that not only you as a total organism but each of the component cells of your body has a feeling that is its own. Look at your cells through a microscope and you can see that they have their individual lives. And if you examine the stream of your blood, you will find it full of all kinds of organisms that are having all sorts of conspiracies and games and plots, eating each other, and doing the same things that we do. However, we wouldn't be a healthy organism unless there were all these wars and fights and plots and politics going on between the various cells in our blood. From their point of view, however, they feel a little bit put upon because they are part of a larger organization. We are in the same situation ourselves because very slowly we human beings are making ourselves into a planetary organism with an electronic nervous system. In science fiction published in the 1920s, it was always expected that future human beings would have enormous heads, because they would have very big brains, and they would be very wise. However, it didn't work out that way because what is happening instead is that the human race is building a brain outside its body. It is an interlocking electronic network of telephonic, radionic, videonic communications that is rapidly being connected with computers, and within a few years you will be able to plug your brain into a computer. You will have a little gadget behind the ear like a hearing aid, and it will be integrated with your brain in such a way that you can

## CHAPTER FOUR

plug in a computer. And perhaps that will be only an intermediate stage, and in the same way that we thought that all communications by electricity had to go through wires, and then discovered radio and television and got rid of the wires, so we may eventually get rid of telephones and radio and television and start communicating by an entirely different method that at present is called ESP. But that will mean that nobody will have a private life anymore, since everybody will automatically read everybody else's thoughts. There will be no defenses because everybody will see right through you, and some people will protest and say, "This is terrible, there is no privacy anymore, and that means there will be no me."

Now, that has already happened to our own cells and our own neurons, and at some time during the course of evolution, they probably objected that their private lives were being taken away and that they were being organized into a body.

Now we are doing the same thing to ourselves here on the earth, and we need to be clever about it. That is to say, we need to do two things at once. First, we need to have a tremendous openness to each other so that you will not care if I read your thoughts and I will not care if you read mine. At the same time, though, each one of us needs to retain our peculiar individuality, almost in the same way that a stomach and a heart, or a kidney and the pituitary gland, have all retained their individuality and are nothing like one another. There is enormous differentiation inside the body, despite the fact that it is a single, distinct organism. I use the word *distinct* rather than *separate* because by *separate* I mean "disjointed" or "cut off from," but by *distinct* I mean something I recognize as a distinguishable pattern perceived as a whole. So, something can be distinct without being separate, in just the same way as back and front can be very different and yet inseparable.

So, there is within practically every living thing a sensation of being at a center of a field of tension and resistance, with a feeling of being a little bit blocked, or shall I say, of being in the way, or of being in one's own way.

Now, just for contrast, imagine the opposite. Suppose for example that you woke up each morning with a feeling of total transparency, without any resistance to the external world. Imagine you were just floating through it: you were part of it, it was part of you, but you were transparent. In just the same way you are not aware of your eyes if you see well. But if there is something wrong with your eyes, if you see spots in front of them, then you become aware of them, and you start noticing your eyes, and they start getting in your way. The Taoist sage Chuang-tzu said that when clothes fit well you are not aware of them, and when your belt fits properly, you do not notice it at all.

In exactly the same way, the perfect form of man is unaware of himself, because he doesn't get in his own way, and becomes perfectly transparent. Now, at this point you may be thinking that I am going to teach you some technique that will allow you to feel perfectly transparent, and that that is the proper way to feel and the way you ought to feel. But things are not quite that simple.

Let us go back to the idea that we are in fact a sort of resistance in the middle of the flow of life, and that because we resist, we hurt a bit. It is through hurting a bit that we know we are here, and people very often really do go to extreme measures to know that they are here. I was in Mexico recently, and I tried to find out what is really behind the displays of blood and gore in Mexican Catholicism. Why do they love those pictures of Christ you see sold in the little shops where his face is green and contorted with horror, and blood is pouring

## CHAPTER FOUR

down from a crown of the longest, spikiest thorns you ever saw stuck into his head? And why do they have crucifixes on which they have carefully modeled sores and open wounds on Christ's body, and all that kind of thing? And why, at Guadeloupe, are there those girls walking on their knees for a mile down the avenue to the altar of the cathedral? What is that all about?

Quite simply the answer is that if you hurt, you know you are there, and that is part of the meaning of penance. In all the trials that people go through, and all the adventures, and all the very difficult torments you subject yourselves to as a result of experiencing things like that, it becomes quite apparent to you that you do truly exist, and you are here. You are a kind of obstacle to the flow of life, and as life impinges upon you, you hurt a bit, and so therefore you know that you are here.

Now then, although people constantly cultivate this sense of "being here," they are also constantly saying that they would rather not have that sense of individuality, and that they would like to forget themselves. So, many people say, "Well, I want to lose myself in somebody else. I want to find a guru or a group to belong to. I want to join the kind of religion that will let me forget myself. I want to go to the movies or read a mystery story to forget myself. I want to fall in love and forget myself. I want to get drunk to forget myself." The peculiar quality of the drug called alcohol is that it turns you off. It makes you increasingly insensitive to pain, and to the pain of being, and so on, so that you can achieve a certain vague, rather misty sense of floating above the pain.

As things stand, one ordinarily doesn't feel that way. And people therefore tend to take alcohol or something else in order to disappear, or at least to be less aware of this sensation of resisting the flow of the world.

Most people are constantly fighting the external world, and if you study your muscles and the dynamics of your body, you will find that you are fighting all the time.

If you really pay attention to your body, and to your posture and muscle tension, then you often find you are fighting the world all of the time. As an experiment, my friend Charlotte Selver sometimes makes a person lie down on the floor, and then she tells the person, "Now look, the floor is solid, and it will hold you up. You don't have to do anything to stay where you are, just lie on the floor." And then she may touch the person slightly and say, "Do you realize you are making an effort just to lie there? Are you afraid that if you don't, you will just turn into a kind of basically formless goo and will spread out all over the floor? But you won't, you see. Your skin, your bones, and your muscles will hold you together. There is nothing to worry about. All you have to do is lie on the floor. You don't have to make any special efforts to hold yourself together." But many people are afraid that they will fall apart or disintegrate somehow if they don't make a constant effort to hold themselves together. Or perhaps they are afraid that they will be absorbed into some outside agency if they are not constantly on the alert to protect themselves.

Now, I am not a preacher, and that is the most important thing you need to understand about me. I am not telling you that you shouldn't do that. But I am inviting you to become immensely aware of the fact that if you are constantly afraid of falling apart, you must therefore have an inevitable sense of being alone, of being a particular, isolated form, unlike any other form on earth. You are just you, and if you concentrate on that, you ought to be able to feel that aloneness without the slightest difficulty. It isn't as if I'm asking you to feel

## CHAPTER FOUR

some kind of unusual transcendental sensation, or something like that. I'm just asking you to feel the very ordinary sensation of you being you, and being alone.

Now, focus on that sensation of distinctness. I will even call it a sensation of separateness. We have all been brought up to feel separate. We have been brought up to feel actually disjoined from the external world, although that isn't our true state at all, of course, because we are as much a part of the external world as a whirlpool is part of a stream. But we are brought up not to notice that. And if you have been brought up that way, and you don't notice that you are as much a part of the world as a whirlpool is of a stream, then you feel an intense sensation of separateness.

The thing to do with any feeling you don't like is to experience it as deeply as possible, to go into the inmost depths of loneliness, for instance, and indeed even into the inmost depths of selfishness. Now, are you selfish? Lots of people try to pretend they aren't. But Krishnamurti showed that all the people who seem to be very good and seem to have the highest ideals are really motivated by the same sort of desires as people who rob banks. Only they give their desires a more noble name, so as to better conceal them.

It is the same with culture. Culture is a way of concealing the fact that we have to eat, or other unpleasant realities. The queen of Spain in the 1860s wore enormous skirts and seemed to float into a room as if she were an angel. Somebody once gave her a present of a dozen pairs of beautiful silk stockings, and her majesty's chamberlain returned them with a letter saying, "Her majesty, the queen of Spain, does not have legs." So, in many ways high cultures are actually just subtle ways of concealing reality, so that pretentious people can pretend they are above the level of the lower classes, whether

human or animal. By now we are all too good to go around crudely banging a bull on the head with a mallet or sticking a knife through it and tearing it apart and eating it. All that is done for us way off in the stockyard, and the meat comes to us in the butcher shop as a completely neutral-looking thing called a steak. But steak has absolutely nothing to do with a cow. A steak is something wrapped up, packaged. Almost nobody picks up a steak and thinks, "Poor cow." A plastic-wrapped steak doesn't even look like a cow, and it doesn't remind you of one in any way—that's culture.

Of course, the most religious people in the world, the greatest saints, are also the greatest rascals. I've known lots of them, and some of them are clergymen, and I must tell you in confidence that some of the filthiest stories I have ever heard in my life were told to me by clergymen.

And incidentally, in Hebrew theology there is a thing called the *yetzer ha-ra*. In the beginning of time, when God created Adam, he implanted in him the *yetzer ha-ra*, and that is a wayward spirit. With the *yetzer ha-ra* he put something funny into mankind so that we would all be a little odd, and it was a result of the *yetzer ha-ra* that Adam was tempted by Eve—and she was tempted by the serpent—to eat that famous fruit. But the Hebrews believed that everything that God created was good, including the *yetzer ha-ra*, because if it hadn't been for that, nothing ever would have happened. Everybody would have obeyed God, and God would have been quite bored. However, if you are God you can't just go out and say, "Disobey me," because if they do, then they are obeying you. God had to be much more subtle than that, so he didn't tell Adam to disobey, he told him to obey, but he slipped this *yetzer ha-ra* inside him, too, so that he would disobey, and then God

## CHAPTER FOUR

could say, “*I’m* not responsible.” So this waywardness will happen on its own, and everyone ultimately wants that.

No matter how you explain it, this “disobedience” is going to happen of its own anyway because everybody wants something to happen. And this is because the sensation of being you, of being a lonely center of awkward sensitivity subject to the most peculiar feelings and pains and anxieties, is an essential prerequisite for feeling something else as well, and the two experiences go together. If, on the one hand, you want to be omnipotent and live in a universe where nothing happens except exactly what you will to happen, then everything must come totally under your control and is absolutely transparent to your intelligence. But the problem is that once everything comes under your central control, even if you are God, everything becomes a bore, from beginning to end. So any being who has a sense of centrality, who has a sense of selfhood and identity, must also have the sense that their identity is separate from everything else that is going on at the same time. But remember that those other things are only arbitrarily defined as not-self, as being not under one’s own control, and they are defined that way so that they can jump out at you at any time—and might even eat you—because then you won’t become bored.

So, first of all I want you to understand that these two sensations—one of being the lonely, central, sensitive, vulnerable self, and the other of living in the midst of a world that feels alien—are really only two aspects of the same sensation. You simply could not have the one without the other. Now, this is a rather good thing to know, because if you do, it means you won’t panic when you experience this sensation of personal disassociation. People who suffer from chronic anxiety are always in

doubt about this curious relationship between what feels like a self and what feels like something else.

Let us suppose you are anxious about your relationship with other people. You walk into a restaurant and sit down to dinner, and there is a stranger opposite you. You know nothing about this person, and perhaps you begin to feel a little reluctant to start a conversation. You don't know whether this person is going to be perfectly fine or some kind of crackpot, or perhaps some kind of stuffed shirt. So you start fencing around a little, and you have the feeling you had better watch yourself. After all, you want to make a good impression, and you don't want to make an enemy. So you watch yourself, and before long a funny kind of self-consciousness becomes apparent, because the secret game that people are playing all the time to defend themselves by putting others down enters the picture. These are really very wicked games because, if the truth be told, every living being is actually a manifestation of everything that there is. This is what was called God in religious language, and every human being is a manifestation of that. We *can* see everyone as one divine being coming at us in different ways, but what we do instead is try to prevent people from realizing that this is so by pointing out their limitations in the most subtle ways. And in doing so, we see if we can faze them or put them off a little to make them uncertain and unsteady. It is very much like a game we call chicken in which if a person waivers, he loses. People play that kind of game with each other all the time, but the real reason they do it is not the one they think it is. The real reason is that if everybody were perfectly clear that they were a manifestation of the divine being, nothing much would happen. So, to keep everybody a little bit unclear about its true nature, the system irritates itself and creates these little doubts. In this way

we can have our little uncertainties, our sensations of blockage and of not being very sure of ourselves, while at the same time knowing very well indeed that we are a self, and that as a self we are alone and everything is up to us. So we have this terrible feeling of responsibility, but what I am trying to point out to you is that if you intensify that feeling and bring it to its highest pitch, you will immediately realize that you are aware of it only by virtue of its contrast with another feeling, the feeling of there being something else here that you have defined as not-you. So the feeling of not-you and the feeling of you, are relative. They go together, and you can't have the one without the other, and if you can't have the one without the other, that means there is a secret conspiracy between them. They are really the same but are just pretending to be different, because if there weren't a difference, you wouldn't know that anything was happening. It would be like that song by Bob Dylan that says something along the lines of "I'm just a guy like you, I'm just like anybody else; it's no use talking to you, because you're just like me." If everyone were the same and shared the same ideas exactly, there would be nothing to talk about. It would all be a perfect bore because everyone else would just be yourself echoing back at you. You would feel like a madman in a hall of mirrors.

Now, you may think I am speaking in favor of some kind of schizoid universe, but I'm not. The whole point is this: it is through difference, and through every variety of differentiation, that unity is discovered. For instance, this business about *vive la petite différence* is very important. The fact that men and women, for example, have a primordial kind of difference, and can never really understand each other, is tremendously exciting because out of that difference something happens. And if something makes a difference, then it is there. If it doesn't make a difference, and it doesn't mat-

ter, then it doesn't exist. You could say it *has* no matter, because differences are like the two sides of a thing, and since you can't have the one side without the other, they really are one, and this is precisely why they become inseparable. Therefore, when you feel as a rather painful fact an extreme sense of your own existence, and that you are alone in the middle of everything else, you may recognize that the *everything else* feeling and the *you* feeling are really the two poles of the magnet, and that they are one and the same process. So that the real you is what lies, as it were, between those poles and includes both of them.

Now, this is the fundamental principle upon which ancient Chinese thought developed. It is the principle of the yang and the yin, and this is one of the oldest ideas on the planet. The philosophy of Taoism, which I speak of when I talk about the *Book of Changes*, or the *I Ching*, is based entirely on the idea that the universe is the result of an interplay between primordial differences, such as *up* and *down*, *back* and *front*, *black* and *white*, *is* and *isn't*, *male* and *female*, *positive* and *negative*. The word *yang* in Chinese refers to the south side of a mountain, which is the sunny side. The word *yin* refers to the north side of the mountain, which is the shady side. Did you ever see a mountain that was south-sided only, with no north side? *Yang* may also refer to the north bank of a river, which gets the sun, and *yin* to the south bank of the river, which gets the shade. And so, of course, the yin-yang symbol is half dark and half light. It looks like two fishes interlocked, chasing each other. They actually form a more complicated symbol, however: a helix. The spiral nebulae have a form like a helix. It is also the position of man and woman making love, in which, fundamentally, each is trying to get inside the other. They are trying to get into the middle of each other, but there is always a difference somehow, and they can never quite

get to the other's center. They are two parts of a whole, just as, if I want to see the back of my head, I can turn it round and round, but I can never quite catch up with it. But that is what makes everything work. It is said in the Vedanta Sutra that the Lord, the supreme knower of all things, who is the knower in all of us, doesn't know himself (or herself) in the same way the fire doesn't burn itself and a knife doesn't cut itself. So, to God, nothing could be more mysterious than God.

You know how sometimes you surprise yourself? For example, when you feel your own pulse, you suddenly feel this life going on in you, like belly rumbles, which you are not causing. Or consider hiccups. Are they something that you are doing, or are they merely something that is happening to you in the same way rain happens to you? This is a very debatable question. Consider breathing. Are you breathing, or is breathing breathing you? You can feel it either way. You can decide to breathe, and feel that you are breathing, just as you can decide to walk. On the other hand, when you forget about breathing altogether, it still goes on, and so it then seems to be something that is happening to you. Which is it? Do you grow your hair, or does your hair just grow? What enables you to make a decision? When you decide, do you first decide to decide, or do you just decide? Now, how do you do that? Nobody knows.

Chuang-tzu tells the story of one philosopher asking another, "How can one get the Tao, which is the power of nature, so as to have it for one's own?" The other philosopher answers, "Your life is not your own. It is the delegated adaptability of Tao. Your offspring are not your own. They are the outputs of Tao. You move, you know not how. You are at rest, you know not why. These are the operations of Tao. So how could you have it for your own?"

If you feel your body, your skin, your solidity, and if you regard your marvelous eyes . . . they are the power that generates sight and color out of all the stimuli of the external world. Think of your ears, those beautiful shells that you wear on the sides of your head. You don't feel responsible for them, you don't know how they are made, but they are you. They are you, and indeed that's what you are. Their extraordinary patterns, their beautiful, gorgeous, wonderful arabesques of tubes and bones and cartilage, and their myriads of interconnecting electronics linking them with your nervous system—that is you, and all of the rest of you is just as wonderful.

But most people don't know this. Instead they say that their body is just some kind of very clever machine, which the Lord God made in His infinite wisdom, and which they have been put into. But this is a very limited view, because the extraordinary thing is that this body really is you. This extraordinary, marvelous *goings-on* is you. But if you want, you can feel that it is just happening to you. If you do want to feel it that way though, then you have to go all the way. You have to feel that your decisions just happen to you too. And the thing that you call yourself, to which things happen, you don't know how you do that either, and so it is just something else that just happens. Your ego and your consciousness just happen too; they are happenings happening to happen, and that is a very interesting path to follow.

But you can also go the other way. You can say, "Now, look here. I really am my eyes, even though I don't understand how they work or how they happened." But then, as you will see, the very Lord God Himself doesn't understand how He happens. Because if He did, what would be the point? There would be no mystery, and there would be no possibility of a surprise.

That is why there has to be both yang and yin, and

I often joke about this. Yang is bright, and he understands everything. Yin is dark, and she'll be damned if she'll be understood. But although we enjoy the contrast between male and female, they are also two phases of the same being. Your yang side is your conscious attention, and all the bright things you know, and all the information you have, and all your know-how. Your yin side is the other side of the yang. It is your unconscious process, and it enables the yang to function. The yang side doesn't know why or how it functions, because the conscious, bright, intelligent, yang side of you depends for its functioning on something it doesn't understand at all. And if the yin side weren't there, yang wouldn't be there either, in just the same way that nothing would be here unless something else were here too. Yin and yang move together.

Now, if you accept the idea that you are your eyes and your heart and your ears, even though you don't control them with your conscious ego and you don't know how they happened or how they work, then, by a little extension of the imagination, you can very well see that in the same way you are one with all the other things that are going on around you. The sun shining, the stars twinkling, the wind blowing, and the great ocean restlessly pounding against the cliffs, they are you too. You don't control them because there has to be something about you that you don't control, or else you wouldn't be you.

Now, you will see that all of this is a very unsophisticated elementary lesson in relativity, but relativity is the underlying foundation of the philosophy of the Tao. Lao-tzu takes it up in the second chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* when he says, "When all the world understands beauty to be beautiful, there is already ugliness. When all the world understands goodness to be good,

there is already evil.” Thus, “to be” and “not to be” arise mutually, and so always arrive together. High and low give rise to each other. Long and short are positioned mutually. Lao-tzu then goes through a long list of opposites to show that they invariably create each other. It is like that wonderful little parable about the Chinese character for *man*, which looks more or less like an upturned V. Lafcadio Hearn told a version of the parable in which a Japanese girl was explaining to her little sister the meaning of the character for man. She took two sticks of wood and balanced them together on the ground so that they formed the upturned character, and she said, “This is the character for man because neither stick will stand up unless it has the other to help it.”

The profound meaning underneath this story is that there is no *self* without the existence of an *other*. And, to return to my original point, every creature in the world feels it is a self, that is to say, human. And it does so because in this situation the thing it feels as itself, with its separate identity, is supported by the equal and opposite sensation of otherness. *Center, periphery, here, there, now, then, is, isn't*. These are the yang and the yin, the two poles, the opposites that hold each other up. Therefore, the Zen poem says, “When misfortune comes, treat it as a blessing; when fortune comes, treat it as a disaster.”



## BEING IN THE WAY II

---

### CHAPTER FIVE

Once upon a time there was a Chinese farmer who lost a horse; it ran away. All his neighbors came around that evening and said, "That's too bad." And he said, "Maybe." The next day, the horse came back and brought seven wild horses with it, and all the neighbors came around and said, "Isn't that great?" And he replied, "Maybe." The next day his son was attempting to tame one of these horses and was thrown from it and broke his leg, and then all the neighbors came around and said, "Well, that's just too bad, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe." The next day the conscription officers came around looking for people for the army,

and they rejected his son because he had a broken leg. All the neighbors came around in the evening and said, "Isn't that wonderful?" And he just said, "Maybe."

This story reflects the sense of a fundamental Taoistic attitude, which is that the whole process of nature is an integrated network of immense complexity. It is impossible to tell whether anything that happens in it is good or bad because you never know what the ultimate consequences of the misfortune will be, and you never know what the ultimate consequences of good fortune will be.

I know a woman who was quite happy until she inherited two million dollars, and then she became absolutely miserable because she was afraid that everybody, especially the government, was going to take it away from her. On the other hand, we have probably all known cases where some sort of ridiculous inconvenience or accident preserved us from a worse fate, or else allowed us to meet someone, to fall in love or form a friendship. You never know what chain or pattern of connection exists between events.

It is for this reason that Taoists have been critical of two things: the first is words and the second is interfering with things. By contrast, the Confucians, who were always literary people, had a practice called the rectification of names. Now, I have to introduce this idea by making a brief remark about Confucians in general, because they have their positive and their negative sides. Their negative side is their rather exclusive interest in literary matters. In the history of Chinese civilization, no significant scientific advances came as a result of Confucian studies. They were scholastics, and a scholastic in those times was one who went by the book, who believed what the ancient text or the ancient scriptures said, and who studied them and became proficient in

them like a rabbi or a Christian theologian. But mystics have never been very interested in theology. Mystics are interested in direct experience, and therefore—although you may laugh at them and say they are not scientific—they are empirical in their approach. And the Taoists, being mystics, were the only great group of ancient Chinese people who seriously studied nature. They were interested in its principles from the beginning, and their books are full of analogies between the Taoist way of life and the behavior of natural forces seen in water, wind, or plants and rocks.

In many passages Lao-tzu likens the Tao to water: it does not resist, and yet nothing is stronger. It always takes the line of least resistance, which men admire, yet it always seeks the lowest level, which men abhor. In Taoism, many things are said about water and about plants and about the processes of growth. Many things are also said about wind, and about how the wind plays music with all the openings in nature, by blowing through them and bringing out their particular hum. So, strangely enough, it was from the Taoists that Chinese people developed as much science as they did. However, they had never developed anything like Western technology, and there were many reasons for this. Some of them were purely geographical, but one of the main reasons the Chinese did not develop an advanced technology had to do with a certain attitude toward names and nature.

Insofar as names were concerned, the Taoist always laughed at the idea of the rectification of names. They said, “Now look, when you compile a dictionary, you must define your words with other words. But with what other words will you be able to define the words you used in the first place?”

I remember when I was a small boy I wanted to write a book that would preserve forever the fundamen-

tals of human knowledge. And so the first thing I wrote down in it was the alphabet. And then I scratched my head as to how I would write down how to pronounce each of those letters. Finally, I tried to spell out in letters how to pronounce them, not realizing, of course, that I'd caught myself in a vicious circle. In order to understand words, you simply must have something else to relate them to, and this is a very mysterious matter.

One realizes how many things one learns as a child, especially from other people, that are never explicitly stated. For example, how do you know whether somebody who says something to you is serious or kidding? A great deal of confusion is caused by that uncertainty, even among adults. The processes that are required for understanding the simplest sentence have been examined and analyzed and studied, and yet we still don't know how the brain of a child accomplishes this extraordinary task. Of course, when one analyzes this task, it seems enormously complicated, but you must realize that analysis is a way of making things extremely complicated even though they may not be complicated in the first place.

Now, a great deal of academic effort goes into the task of proving things that everyone already knows. However, the idea is to say precisely what the thing is that everybody knows. How can we delimit it and pin it down exactly? This is also the pursuit of law, and has become a part of the legal system. That is why, in legal language, when one only wants to say the simplest thing, one says "I devise, bequeath," and so on, instead of "I give," because one wants to be sure there can be absolutely no doubt about what is being said. But as a matter of fact, the more definite you become when describing something with words, the more doubt you create. And so the Taoists adopted a profoundly humor-

ous attitude toward the Confucian's interest in spelling everything out. The Taoists said, basically, that things can never really be spelled out.

Have you ever played a game called vish? The name stands for "vicious circle," and each player has a copy of the same dictionary. Many words are put in a hat, and the referee draws one of them—for instance, *escalator*—and reads it out loud, and then each player looks up its definition in the dictionary, and from that definition each player selects one key word and looks it up. And they keep doing this until one finally comes to a definition that has the word *escalator* in it. The first person to successfully complete the circle calls out "Vish!" and is the winner. Now, this shows you how dictionaries are completely circular, unless they have little pictures, which give an entirely different way of understanding words. Otherwise a dictionary is an entirely circular process. It's simply a self-defining affair. When I pick up a Finnish dictionary, which has nothing in it but the Finnish language, it doesn't tell me a thing because I haven't got the key. So, the key to language is not altogether communicable by means of language. It is for this reason, then, that the Taoists were skeptical of the ability of words to describe processes in the physical world.

Now, the Chinese language is a rather peculiar language because it neither declines its nouns nor conjugates its verbs. There are certain ways, sometimes, of showing whether a verb indicates the future or the past, but in general, literally translated Chinese reads like a telegram. And so the opening of the chapter on *te* in the Lao-tzu book, that is to say, the chapter on power or virtue, says in literal English, "Superior virtue not conscious. Thus it has virtue. Inferior virtue not let go of virtue, thus this not virtue." This style speaks it so succinctly, but we have to go bubbling around to say this in

English and end up with: "The superior form of virtue is not conscious of itself as virtue, and thus truly is virtue. But the inferior form of virtue so insists on being virtuous that it is not virtue." Well, that is a very complicated way of stating things. The literal Chinese says it so pithily, and in doing so preserves the broadest range of meaning.

On the other hand, both we and the Japanese have a better language for describing technological processes. You know how it is when you get a set of instructions for putting something together. It tells you to do this first, then that, and then do the other thing. Well, if you should get a Chinese product sometime, with instructions for assembly translated from the Chinese, and you don't already know how to put the thing together, you're out of luck. But the compensatory delight of the Chinese language is that you can say several things at once and mean them all.

Along with the Taoist realization that language is a net that will never capture the world, there is also a Taoist reluctance to interfere with the processes of nature. What you think may be a good thing to do may be good only in the short run. It may turn out to be disastrous in the long run. To give a very simple example of this, which is very close to the hearts of all Chinese and Asian people, consider the problem of population. What on earth are we going to do about it? In times past the huge populations of India and China were pruned by perennial outbreaks of cholera and other diseases and famines that wiped out millions of people. But now, with the methods of modern medicine and agriculture, we are beginning to stamp out these plagues. However, a new plague is turning up in the form of human beings, there are too many human beings: but you can't go around shooting people in cold blood. It was somehow

better if the cholera did it, because that was impersonal and it bore no one any malice. When human beings have to decide to get rid of each other, though, that's real trouble. Therefore, a Taoist would be inclined not to interfere with the course of events because, on the whole, they are too complex to be dealt with through verbal interpretations. All that we call scientific knowledge is a verbal interpretation of what is going on. It selects certain things and calls them good, and it selects certain other things and calls them bad, but the Taoist feels that he doesn't know, in verbal terms, whether a given event is good or bad. He may feel badly about it, but he may also feel that that is simply the proper and appropriate way to feel under such a circumstance, and that the circumstance, and the feeling, will pass. As Lao-tzu said, "The fierce gale does not last the whole morning, nor does pelting rain go on all day." He then goes on to say, "If heaven and earth cannot keep these things up for long, how much less can mankind."

This, then, is a basic attitude in Taoist philosophy, and it goes by the name of *wu wei*. *Wu* means "not," and *wei* means "doing," "interfering," "business," "poking into things." So *wu wei* means "don't interfere," "don't strive." Really, the best meaning of *wu wei* is "don't force it." As when, for example, you're opening a lock and the key doesn't turn. If you force it you will just bend the key. So what you have to do is jiggle, pull back and forth, and jiggle again, until you find the place where the key turns. That is the meaning of *wu wei*. It doesn't mean total passivity. On one hand it means "don't interfere," but on the other there is no way of not interfering. Even when you merely look at something, you interfere with it, because your very existence is an interference with the environment, from a certain point of view. So there you are. Everything you

do alters the balance. Even if you sit perfectly still, you are still breathing, and that alters the nature of things that are going on around you. You are exuding heat, and that changes something. And when you eat, you really start changing things. So you can't avoid interfering, and yet the maxim is "don't interfere." But what that really means is "don't force it."

So then, what do you do? Well, you interfere as wisely as possible. That is to say, you interfere along the lines in which things are already developing. This is like sailing a boat. It is much smarter to sail than to row, because sailing requires less of your energy. You simply use the wind by putting up a sheet. But then, supposing the wind isn't going where you want to go? In that case, you learn to tack. You keep the wind in your sails all the time, and you use the wind to go against the wind. From this comes the idea of judo. *Judo* is Japanese for "the gentle Tao," "the gentle way." In judo, the basic principle is that you are not an attacker. Underneath judo is a deeper philosophy called aikido, "the way of *aiki*." And the idea of aikido is that you can never be attacked, because when somebody attacks you, you are not there. Or, you are, but in the form of a vacuum, so that the attacker gets sucked in so fast by his own force that he falls over. In judo one always uses the strength of one's opponent to bring about his downfall. At a certain point you may add your own strength. When you are throwing someone in judo, there is a point when his own strength has taken him beyond the peak. When something is falling over, it reaches a certain point where it is on the way down. It is at this moment that you can add your strength to your opponent's momentum. But he has to be beyond the falling point for maximum effect, because from there you are working *with* gravity.

Judo is a Japanese development of the Taoist philosophy, and it is relatively modern. But it comes out of

understandings that emerged from Chinese ways of doing things, and in its present form it is a basic demonstration of the principle of wu wei. Wu wei is not an attitude of total passivity, as is sometimes inferred from too literal a translation: “not do”; it is more correctly “not force” or an attitude of “don’t force it.” In every situation you need to find out which way the wind is blowing and trim your sails to the wind. That is the meaning of wu wei. But how do you know which way the wind is blowing? A scientist might say, “Well, we have to make a very careful analysis of the situation and find out just what is going on.” This strategy leads to something that is extremely interesting. Scientists are going about this analysis very seriously, and it has led to the very important science of ecology. In ecology we study the whole complex of relationships that lie between any organism and its environment, and they are quite fantastic. When you study, for example, the ecology between man and the world of microbes, you are confronted with a most surreal affair, and you may try to decide which microbes are the good guys and which are the bad. You want to know how to get rid of the bad guys without getting rid of the good guys, and then you realize you need some of the bad guys because otherwise the good guys fall apart. Some of our medicines are very much, on the level of our body, like what DDT is on the level of agriculture. They are too indiscriminate, and they kill too many of the good guys along with the bad guys. After a time you become very doubtful as to the precise definition of *good* and *bad*, because every group, every species, must have an enemy. That is an important part of the mutual eating society we call life. If you don’t have an enemy, then you start multiplying too much. Because nothing “prunes” you, you start eating up all your supplies of food because there are too many of you, and you start getting in your own way. You are so

successful you never have to fight, and you develop flabby muscles, and so, gradually, the successful group fails. A group that manages to obliterate all its enemies will fall apart; that is the way the world works. So, the question has become, can we maintain the human race without bloodshed? Can we somehow introduce a new kind of gamesmanship as a substitute for war?

One of the problems of present-day international politics is that the United States, with its vast prosperity and enormous facilities for living the lazy life, must have an external enemy to keep fit. And so, even though the Cold War was in a way total nonsense because an atomic war between Russia and the United States would simply have ended the human race, the populace still had to be kept bamboozled. We have to keep fighting wars in places like Vietnam in order to keep everybody excited, and in order to create enemies and keep the soldiers in practice. It is a horrible business, but that is the way things have always been run. And the question is, can we run the human race in a new way, without bloodshed and murder and torture?

The same principle applies in business, almost exactly. If you wipe out your competitor, then you have no reason to produce anything but a lousy product, and then someone else with a good product can come along and wipe you out despite your success. So, there is always something self-defeating in any attempt to succeed. Nothing fails like success. It is for this reason, then, that the Taoists always have an attitude of caution. "Cautious," as Lao-tzu says, "as one who crosses a river in spring." That means to be cautious either because of the spring floods or because the ice is still there and you are not quite sure how strong it is. Therefore the Taoist tries to develop a sensibility to the situation as it is. He tries to feel intuitively the kind of action that is required

under each different circumstance. He does this intuitively because he feels that he can never discover it analytically, with his conscious attention alone.

To talk in modern Western terms about how this is done, we must realize of course that we are equipped inside our heads with an absolutely fantastic thing called the brain. With its millions and millions of neurons, it is, as it were, the most amazing computer ever devised. Basic to the Taoist attitude to life is the idea that you have within yourself the most amazing capacity for analysis that exists in the known world, and the point is to try to get it to work for you. And instead of trying with the conscious attention alone (which can think of only about three things at a time), you need to use intuition too. Very few people can do four things at once without using a pencil. You can do four if you are a trained musician, playing four different lines of a fugue, and an organist can keep six in mind, because an organist plays with the feet, too. But it requires a high amount of training to be able to do this with conscious attention alone, and even if you could keep as many as six variables in mind at once, the world around us has infinitely many variables going on simultaneously. You can try to reason about everything with your conscious, verbal thinking. For instance, you can make a contract in business and try to figure out all the variables. But there are always variables you couldn't possibly foresee. For instance, your partner might slip on a banana skin and break his neck, and even if you took into account that possibility, there are still so many other possibilities that you simply cannot think of them all. So then the question arises, is it within the power of the human brain, because of its immense complexity, to comprehend reality unconsciously in a way that surface consciousness cannot? The Taoist would say that it certainly is. If you

## CHAPTER FIVE

learn to use your brain by allowing it to go to work on your problems without interference from the surface consciousness, it will deliver you a decision. And this is why, when you get to the real study of Taoist and Zen Buddhist practice, you come to the point where you learn to act without making decisions—or rather, to use a less precise and more exact word, without choosing.

Krishnamurti spoke a great deal about being choicelessly aware. He said, “Freedom is precisely the state of not having to choose.” Now, that sounds quite paradoxical, because we are always talking about freedom of choice. But choice in this sense of the word is not a form of freedom. What is choice in Krishnamurti’s sense of the word? It is the act of hesitation that comes before making a decision. It is a mental wobbling, much like when some people take up a pen to write but don’t just start writing; they jiggle the pen around indecisively for a while and then start. When a person comes into a room and hesitates and wonders who to talk to, in that moment he is choosing. Whereas when a person comes into a room and goes up to someone without waiting to choose, we say he is decisive. But that is a funny thing to say, because it really means that he hadn’t stopped to decide.

Zen Buddhism, which is a Buddhist extension of Taoism, arose out of the marriage of Buddhism and Taoism in the fifth century A.D. and over the following centuries. In Zen they have a way of training you so that you always act without choosing. For example, if a Zen master’s roof were leaking and he said to a couple of monks attending him, “The roof is leaking,” one monk might disappear and come back instantly with a sieve and put it under the drips. The other, after some time, might come back with a bucket. Now, the master might well praise the monk who had come back quickly with

the sieve. That action wasn't exactly appropriate for catching rain, but the point is that it was action in the spirit of Zen: action without choosing.

You will notice this type of behavior with certain people. They never hesitate. If something needs to be done, they always seem to simply grab something and do it. That is action in a kind of Zen capacity, and so the teacher of Zen constantly throws his students curves by putting them in dilemmas in which they have to act immediately. Now, of course, one of the things that you mustn't do in such a situation is rush, because rushing is also a form of hesitation. When a person rushes to get a train, he starts to fall over his own feet. Rushing really slows him down, because it is like trying to drive at high speed through the water with a blunt-nosed boat.

What the Zen student is trying to achieve is a kind of smooth, unhesitating, flowing action in response to the challenge. And this must be done with what is called *wu nien* in Chinese, or *mu nen* in Japanese. *Mu nen* is composed of the character meaning "now" and the character meaning "mind-heart," and so it has the meaning of a thought. However, for us it is well translated by the psychological term *blocking*. You might say of people when they hesitate, when they dither, when they stop to choose, that they are blocking. So the attitude of *mu nen*, or *wu nien*, is the attitude of the unblocked mind that doesn't hesitate ever, just as the river doesn't hesitate when it flows, and just as when you clap your hands the sound comes out without hesitation. When the moon rises, the water doesn't wait to reflect it; it reflects it instantly.

So that instant reflection, or that kind of resonance, is what is looked for in Zen in the response of an individual to his environment, and this response is achieved to the degree that the individual knows himself

to be one with his environment. His capacity for response increases to the degree that he feels he is simply part of it, and not someone with a barrier around him through which messages must pass. When there's a barrier, then decisions have to be made up and sent out through it. So then, you could say that a kind of extremely subtle sensory awareness has to be developed between the individual and his environment.

Of course, this sort of talk has been very unpopular, because scientifically minded people, and especially academic scientists who teach in universities, are exceedingly suspicious of intuitive reactions. They say, "Nonsense, you can get into all sorts of trouble that way." However, the thing that they neglect to realize is that everybody uses intuition. Even the most meticulously careful, analytical, rigorous, and sound scientist must use intuitive judgment after a certain point. Why? Because you can accumulate data forever without ever deciding anything. So, one might ask, when you do decide, why do you decide? Usually it's because your time is up and somebody's pressing you for a decision, or else you are just bored to death with bringing in more and more data. You never know how much data you will need to make a decision, and therefore you may go on collecting data until you're blue in the face. And so, in the last analysis, your decision will be based on a hunch. In the end, much is actually decided by the flipping of coins, and the pity of that method of making decisions is that it only gives you two choices: heads or tails, yes or no.

The Chinese developed a more subtle way of flipping coins. They have a method that is like flipping a sixty-four-sided coin, and instead of just heads or tails, there are sixty-four possible choices to be used for coming to a decision. This method is called the *I Ching*, or

the *Book of Changes*. It is based on two symbols: one for yang and one for yin. Yang is a straight, undivided line, and yin is a line that is broken in the middle.

In the system of the *I Ching*, each of the sixty-four possible choices is represented by one of the sixty-four hexagrams of the *I Ching*. A hexagram is a figure composed of six lines, which are determined to be yang or yin by flipping three coins six times, or by the dividing of yarrow sticks. Accordingly, these individual lines can be arranged into eight different three-line trigrams, and these eight trigrams can be combined into a total of sixty-four six-line hexagrams. And so the sixty-four ways are the sixty-four hexagrams of the *I Ching*. Therefore, when you have to make a grave decision, you do so by dividing sticks or tossing coins through six repetitions, and that gives you one of these sixty-four figures. Each figure has its own commentary, but if you are very wise and have studied the *Book of Changes* for a long time, you do not need to refer to the commentary. You can tell what any hexagram means just by looking at it, because each of the two trigrams, an upper and a lower that make up one hexagram, has its own quality. For instance, a hexagram may be composed of one trigram with the quality “water” over a second trigram with the quality “heaven,” and a person very skilled in the interpretation of the *I Ching* will understand the meaning of “water over heaven.” But if you are not so skilled, you use the book with its commentaries, and for each hexagram the book has an oracle. It tells you in curiously vague and at the same time in curiously precise terms the meaning of that hexagram. And then, in the light of your own situation, you must make up your mind as to what it is saying. In the light of the problem that you have raised, the question that you’ve asked, the decision that you must make, you will find invariably

that one of these sixty-four choices will have some peculiarly appropriate thing to say to you.

Consulting the *I Ching* is just like having a conversation with a very wise old gentleman. Even today, in Asia, this book is still used widely for making business and political decisions, although perhaps people who are Westernized would be less apt to admit that they use it. So anybody who does politics or business with Asia should be completely versed in this book to know what sort of thinking, what sort of approach, might possibly arise.

If you could find out what hexagram had fallen when a certain politician had made a decision, it would be immensely enlightening as to his future course of action. Hitler was always consulting astrology, and so our strategists should have been students of astrology. They would have had access to Hitler's horoscope, and so they would have known what he was thinking. Astrology is more suited to this kind of spying than the *I Ching* is because we would have known that Hitler was looking at his own horoscope, but we wouldn't have known what hexagram Mao Tse-tung had thrown when he decided to do something or other.

The point I was making is that our scientists are very suspicious of the intuitive judgment, but nevertheless they all use it in the end. The suspicion that science has of intuitive judgment has filtered down to the laypeople, and now even they mistrust their own intuition, that is to say, the marvelous analytical powers of their own brains. And so we are always in doubt as to whether we are behaving the right way, doing the right thing, and so on and so forth, and so we lack a certain kind of self-confidence. And as you know, if you lack self-confidence, you will make mistakes simply through sheer fumbling. But if you have self-confidence, you may get away with doing the entirely wrong thing.

As a young man growing up near London, I realized that the British have an enormous degree of self-confidence. They know they are right, they don't even question it, and you can't shake them. They are so sure they are right, they don't even feel the need to defend themselves, and therefore they can allow all kinds of political opposition, total free speech, and all sorts of things that make Americans very nervous, because Americans don't have the same degree of aplomb. They are not quite as sure of themselves. In Britain, when you are an aristocrat and your family has been brought up for generations in the right schools, there is never any doubt whatsoever about who you are, and so you don't even mention the fact that you are an aristocrat. That is why the aristocrats know how to treat servants. They never have to emphasize their own superiority to anybody because they know they are superior and they don't even question it. It is extraordinary, the kind of nerve they have built up.

Now, in Zen practice, you have to regard yourself as a cloud, because, of course, clouds never make mistakes. Have you ever seen a cloud that was misshapen? Have you ever seen a badly designed wave? No. They are always right. They always do the right thing, and as a matter of fact, so do we. We are natural beings, just like clouds and waves; however, we play complicated games that cause us to doubt ourselves. But if you will treat yourself as a cloud for a while, or a wave, you will realize that you can't make a mistake, whatever you do. Even if you do something that seems to be totally disastrous, somehow or other it will all come out in the wash. When you realize this, you will develop another kind of confidence, and through that confidence you will be able to trust your own intuition. The thing you have to be careful about though—and many people who do not understand Zen properly fall into trouble here—is that

## CHAPTER FIVE

when you take the attitude that you can't possibly make a mistake, you can overdo it.

A lot of people say, "Well, in Zen, anything goes, because you are naturally with it anyway. You are a buddha no matter what you do. And so, I am going to prove it, by breaking all the rules." You may put on the weirdest and most ragged clothes, and start stealing things and doing all kinds of questionable things. But that is overdoing it, and it shows that you haven't learned, because you are overcompensating. You are just reacting to having been told before to do this, do that, and do the other thing, and to be self-conscious and nervous. So you have just gone to the other extreme. However, this is the middle way, and trusting intuition has nothing to do with deciding to do something or not deciding to do it. Whatever you decide, or even if you decide not to decide, you are still like a cloud, and like water. And through that realization, without overcompensating in any direction, you will come to the point where you begin to be on good terms with your own being, and are able to trust your own brain. At that level you become suprapersonal, and you stand or sit as a unified body.

Now, according to certain cosmological theories, the universe began with a primordial explosion. That cosmic explosion is still happening, and today we are the little curlicues far out on the edge of it, and we are all connected. We are still expanding as part of the original explosion, and that explosion, in a certain sense, is in you, and you are still manifesting it. Consider your hand picking up a stone. The stone is very ancient, but how old is it? Scientists will say it comes from the Pleistocene age and is probably about one million years old. But hold on for a minute. What do they mean by one million years old? Where did it come from? What was it *before*

it was a stone? It *was* something or other. It goes back, back, back in time, and therefore everything you touch, including yourself, is incredibly ancient. Everything goes back to the very beginning of time, and so, if your mind awakens, you will suddenly see that all your friends are really incredibly ancient. I don't mean ancient in the sense of "old and haggard" but ancient like angels, eternal beings who have always been here, right from the beginning.



# LANDSCAPE, SOUNDSCAPE

---

## CHAPTER SIX

**I** once spoke with a woman, a perfectly ordinary nice little old lady, who told me that she had once been in an accident in an elevator and had broken her leg. She was stuck there for half an hour before anybody could get to her, and she said that during that time she realized that in this whole universe there is not one single grain of sand that is out of place. This is a curious vision, and it occasionally comes to people suddenly when they see that they have been looking at things in absolutely the wrong way. And it is strange, but usually they don't dare talk to other people about it, because they're afraid they will be misunderstood. But as you see, sometimes the most frightful things that can

## CHAPTER SIX

possibly happen lead to this feeling that everything is in its proper place. At first this seems to be a very strange and very odd idea, but when you rid yourself of the idea of the governor and the governed, the boss and the employee, the king and the subject, you discover there aren't any victims. Every creature that suffers in this world is—perhaps unbeknownst to itself—causing itself to suffer, and no one else is responsible. There are no victims, because the whole universe is a unity. It is, of itself, so. Everything is, of itself, so, and there is no one to blame.

When a child becomes a juvenile delinquent, the social workers and the police come around and say, "Look here, you're behaving terribly," and the juvenile, if he has learned a little psychoanalysis, will answer, "It's all my parents' fault. They brought me up in a traumatic way. They were divorced, my father was an alcoholic, and my mother was a prostitute. So what did you expect of me?" And the public servants will say, "Perhaps we should go after the parents instead." But the parents, because they too have learned a little Freud, will say, "It wasn't our fault. It was our parents' fault. They were neurotic too."

And so you see, you can pass the buck back and back, just as Adam did in the story of Genesis in the Garden of Eden, when he passed the buck to Eve. The Lord God saw him after he'd eaten the fruit, and Adam said, "This woman that thou gavest me, she tempted me and I did eat." And God looked at the woman and said, "Well, what about it?" And she said, "The serpent tempted me." And God looked at the serpent and the serpent didn't say anything. No, the serpent didn't pass the buck, he didn't make any excuses, because he knew.

In this way, you see, you can pass the buck back all the time and accept no responsibility for your life. You could say, "I'm only alive because you, my father,

messed around with my mother, and you went too far, and she became pregnant. It isn't my fault." Now, this is a terribly irresponsible attitude. You must recognize that you were your father's own desire, that that was you, that glint in his eye, and that you yourself go back and back and back and back.

Suppose I make a splash of ink on a paper. From the center, where it hits, it sprays out like an explosion. So way back in the beginning of time, during the big bang, there was a colossal explosion. And as the explosion expands, the spray becomes finer and finer and finer. But you can still see that it is all part of the same thing, reaching out as you would spread your fingers. We are all little extensions, reaching out and connecting right back to the beginning of time. Our bodies are the most ancient things there are because we were right there from the beginning. And although it took millions of years to get here, we were in it right from the start, as that original impulse that blew the whole thing up.

Everything happens of itself, and it is a very interesting experiment to let sound just come to your ears. Try this: close your eyes and allow yourself gently to become aware of the whole world of sound around you and in you. Don't try to identify the sounds or put names on them. Just let them happen. Don't feel that you must not make any sounds yourself, like belly rumbles, hiccups, coughing and so on. They are all perfectly part of the theme. Just, for the moment, let all the sounds happen. Even when people talk, don't make any sense of what they are saying. It's just sound. You should listen like this before you go to sleep at night, and realize that you live in a magical, musical continuum, all the time.

But as you soon discover, ordinarily we keep trying to correct what we are listening to. We pay attention to this; we say to ourselves, "Ignore that." We say to the

children, “Shut up, I can’t hear myself thinking.” But if you really know how to listen, you can concentrate on anything you want to in the middle of complete pandemonium.

In the same way that you can conduct experiments in listening, you can also conduct experiments in using your eyes, in tasting, in feeling things. For example, you can pick up rocks and feel them, without thinking words about them. And all of this is just letting yourself function, it is an act of faith in your own being. Letting your brain give you answers, but at the same time allowing the body to feel, is to be a democracy instead of a tyranny, or, shall we say, at least a republic.

So, when you allow the body to do what it will, then you are saying, “I’m letting it do what I want.” But wait a minute, now, wait a minute. Who are you? Are you separate from the republic of your body? Just as the Tao itself is not something other than the universe, is not a boss over it, neither are you something other than this decision—which is not just the body, either, but includes all sorts of relationships with the universe. You don’t stand apart from your body; you don’t *have* it, you *are* it. And you are all of these relationships, and not just an inspector watching everything that goes by on the street. You may think you are, and indeed, we all have a sensation of being the inspector who watches everything happen. This is so partly because of memory, which seems to give us the impression that one is a standing mirror that reflects everything that goes by. On one hand memory gives us this impression, but on the other hand we get this impression because we keep trying to fight and resist change. We are resisting it all the time.

If you were actually aware of all your muscular reactions, you would find that you are going around most of the day fighting something. If you get a person to lie on the ground and then say to them, “Now you

are completely supported by the floor. You won't fall through it. Therefore, relax," it is very difficult for people to relax like that, because they are afraid that if they don't hold themselves together, they will turn into some kind of goo that will spread out across the floor and drip through the cracks. So everybody is trying to use their skin and their muscles to hold themselves together, but it will all take care of itself. They won't fall apart. But they don't really believe that. So there is a constant resistance going on inside most people. You can be aware of it as a sense of strain between the eyes. That is its center, and it is this constant sensation of resistance to life that you actually feel when you think about yourself. "I" is that feeling of resistance.

If you let go, however, you will discover that there is no necessity whatsoever for an inspector who watches everything that happens. You are what you experience. Your experience and you are the same. Your thoughts are you, your feelings are you. So there is no necessity whatsoever to try and to stand aside from them and say "You, go away!" In other words, if you can trust yourself to the flow of whatever's going on, you won't need to resist it. And you will find that going with the flow works very well, just as your eyes work well when you don't try to force them to and your clothes are comfortable when you are unaware of them.

Now, this nonresistance isn't the same as numbness. It is quite different. You experience your body in terms of what you ordinarily think of as "everything else." We are taught to think we are looking at it "out there." But, what is the color of your head from the point of view of your own eyes? You don't have a sensation of it at all. It is as if from your own point of view, you had no head. And really, how it looks inside is everything you see "out there." Everything we see is really inside us because our optical nerves are behind the

## CHAPTER SIX

eyes. All the shapes and colors around us are actually mental states. Therefore, what we are looking at when we look “out there” is the inside of our own heads. Which means that, because the inside of your head is you, you can’t be said to be looking out at it, because the inside of your head is *you*. All this is how you feel, and this is true for each person. It is not more especially true for me than it is for you. It is mutual, and so we are like the dewdrops on the spider’s web reflecting one another.

It is this attitude of letting your mind work by itself, of letting your eyes see for themselves, that is the preliminary movement toward naturalness in the way that Taoists understand that word. Now, let’s go on from that point to see how they express that naturalness.

The Taoists have traditionally used two images. One is of the uncarved block and the other is of unbleached silk. These two images lie at the root of all the great art forms of the Far East that are associated with Taoism and Zen Buddhism. Later I am going to explore the Japanese tea ceremony because that is the best possible demonstration of this particular mood. It demonstrates what you might call the art of the controlled accident, because it combines discipline with spontaneity. The image of the uncarved block is also expressed in a Japanese art called *bonseki*, which means the “cultivation of stones.” You might call it the art of growing stones. The Japanese national anthem says, “May our Emperor reign a thousand years, reign ten thousand, thousand years, until little stones grow into mighty rocks, thick-velveted with ancient moss.”

The idea behind *bonseki*, first of all, is that stones are alive. Next is the idea that the beauty of stones is to be found in their natural shapes. The Japanese love their stone gardens and display a genius for the selection of

marvelous stones. They like the kind of stones that are found in a mountain stream, that have been worked on by the water until they look almost like clouds. They will take one such stone and put it into a mule cart and bring it down from the mountains. Instead of just dumping it in the garden, though, and patching some moss onto it, they will take it away to a corner where it is damp, where the moss will grow on it naturally. In Japan, moss grows quite quickly, and when the moss has grown on the stone, they will move it into the exact place they wanted it to be in the garden. And then they will arrange sand and pebbles around it in such a way that it will look as if it had always been there.

And even though the stones have been placed by a gardener, remember that there is nothing that is unnatural, nothing at all. The idea that there is something artificial is itself a completely artificial idea. In a way, a skyscraper is really as natural as a bird's nest, but the problem is, how does one demonstrate naturalness? The challenge is to make a skillful approximation about the natural. But if it were just natural, it wouldn't call attention to what it is doing. It wouldn't point that out. And so the idea of the artist then, when he makes a bowl or selects a rock, is that the bowl should get the bowl, and the rock should get the rock. The rock should look so much like that rock you were always looking for.

The other side of the idea, of unbleached silk, is an appreciation of the roughness of something soft. You know how nice it is when you have unbleached silk. The colors are soft and the threads uneven, with a sort of texture that gives us a wonderful feeling. It is primitive but marvelous. When the great masters of Taoist and Zen Buddhist art uncluttered their minds and got them working properly, they discovered that some of the simplest things of everyday life—simple utensils that we use

in the kitchen, the cheapest rice bowls that might be used by a peasant—were extraordinarily beautiful. These simple things were unsophisticated, natural in the same way that a three-year-old child who starts dancing is natural. There is no self-consciousness, no playing to the gallery, nothing—the child is just dancing. That is naturalness.

Now, the question is, how can an adult, who is all fouled up, recapture that natural spontaneity? This is what the greatest artists sweat blood trying to do. They try to make their work look as if it had happened by itself, as if it had just grown there.

Of course there are exceptions to this aesthetic principle. Beethoven, in some of his sonatas, arranged the fingering to be as unnatural and difficult as possible, but for artistic reasons, so as to achieve the feeling that the playing of the music required immense effort. But that is the exception that proves the rule. Ordinarily, the expert musician seems to be expending no effort at all. The music just happens through his fingers. But if he wants to portray effort for some particular artistic reason, this trickery is introduced.

For the most part, the artist works and works all his life long to become again as a child, to regain original innocence and naturalness. But what happens then is that, through doing that work, the artist becomes the master of a tremendously sophisticated technique. He learns exactly how to control his hand, his brush, his paints, his chisels, whatever it is that he is using. Of course, pure technique isn't enough. However well you know how to say something, it doesn't necessarily follow that you will have anything to say. You can be a master of the English language and yet have only boring ideas. Therefore, somehow, you have to put your technique at the disposal of what we call inspiration, and

that means at the disposal of the holy spirit, or the flow of life.

The artist who, in the Chinese way, practices for years and years with his brush, finds in the end that he cannot by any stratagem of his own, or by any technique or cleverness, create a worthwhile painting. Therefore, he has to give up. Well, this “giving up” is precisely what lies behind all that we recognize as the naturalistic art of the Far East.

Of course, there are many different kinds of Far Eastern art. For example, the finest pottery of the Sung dynasty—which takes us back to 1000 A.D.—is completely unlike what most people think of as Chinese porcelain. One thinks of white eggshell-like pottery with very delicate designs of birds and butterflies and fine ladies. But the finest Sung pottery is heavy, jade green, soft looking, very self-effacing in a way, but with a certain roughness. Or consider Japanese raku ware. It definitely looks handmade. It looks as if it hadn't been put on a wheel. The glaze is allowed to drool, and the clay at the bottom of the bowl has been left exposed. But, you see, that coloration reminds the artist of autumn, and wants us to see that the bowl is made of clay, because a good potter does not force clay to obey his preconceived ideas. He evokes the spirit in the clay to do some magic. So then, because the clay did that, these artists love the clay. They don't want to make it look like something else, like ivory, for instance; they want it to look like clay.

And so also with wood. Wood is loved by such artists. They love the grain in wood, and therefore they deplore paint. Lacquer is all right, provided it is used sparingly. But by and large, wood is beautiful, and its grain is left exposed. In the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto there are verandahs of wood with the most gor-

## CHAPTER SIX

geous grain you ever saw in your life. They are simply enchanting, and it is like some kind of vision, and you think you are going to go out of your mind, looking at this grain. It is just gorgeous.

In the same way, in the typical Japanese house, by the edge of the alcove called the *tokonoma*, there is almost invariably a wooden pillar made from an unplaned tree trunk or branch. You can still see the knots and the curves in it. Sometimes the Japanese get some rather exaggerated trunks, I think, that are absurdly nubbly. But in the same way that we have learned to like driftwood, they have learned to appreciate those unplaned trunks and branches. And in keeping with the Taoist spirit, one should appreciate wood as wood and not try to make it look like plastic or marble or metal or anything else.

The same is true with paper. The Chinese don't like our paper. They say it has no character. They like paper with little threads and a texture to it. They feel that is really what makes paper paper. The paper *gets* the paper, and paper like that captures the essence of its feeling. They feel that our paper is more like some kind of plastic—a nonsubstance—and that we are in danger of being engulfed by plastic because we have no love for the uncarved block and the unbleached silk, which are fundamental, substantial, and natural.

Once upon a time there were in Japan two very great sword makers. I should remember their names, but I am afraid I don't, so let's call them Mr. Matsushima and Mr. Yamaguchi. Fanciers of swords could never make up their minds about which of these two was the better sword maker, but certainly they were the unquestioned masters of the art. One day a group of samurai thought to put them to the test. They thought that probably Mr. Matsushima was tops, but on the other hand,

Mr. Yamaguchi came so close. So they took a sword made by each master and brought them both to a stream. First they took Mr. Yamaguchi's sword and dipped it into the water, with the edge facing upstream. They set a piece of paper floating downstream toward it, and as it came up to the edge of the sword, it simply divided itself in half, and when the pieces had passed behind the blade, they simply rejoined and floated on down the stream. Now, that is a hard act to follow. But they took Mr. Matsushima's sword and dipped it in the stream and likewise set a piece of paper floating down toward it. And what do you suppose happened? Just as the piece of paper approached the edge of the sword, it moved to one side, avoiding the edge of the blade entirely, and when it had passed the blade, it moved back on course and continued on.

Obviously, Mr. Matsushima was the better of the two swordsmiths. And why? For the same reason that the highest accomplishment in fencing is called the No Sword School. The highest accomplishment is to be so good at it that you never have to use a sword. And there are all kinds of marvelous tales about great samurai warriors trained in Zen and swordsmanship who never had to use a sword.

You may have seen a movie called *Samurai* which comes in three parts. It takes you three evenings to see it. It is the story of the life of Miyamoto Musashi, who was one of the greatest swordsmen in all of Japanese history. It doesn't tell the story of his entire life; it only takes you to the point where he duels with another champion, who, out of vanity, had insisted on challenging him. Musashi fights him at first using nothing but an oar that has had its blade chopped off. He maneuvers his challenger into a position on a beach where the rising sun dazzles his opponent, and when his opponent makes a

terrific swipe at him, he jumps over the sword and draws his own and kills the challenger instantly. But then he is very unhappy that he has had to kill such a swordsman. At that point he finally takes the advice of the Zen master Takuan, who has all along been trying to dissuade him from a military career. So sometime later he was on his way to Kyoto. That meant that he had to cross Lake Bewa in a small ferryboat that was rowed by a ferryman. And when he was on board, another samurai, a very vulgar fellow who had had too much sake to drink, came aboard and saw Musashi. "What school of swordsmanship do you belong to?" the drunken samurai asked. Musashi answered, "The No Sword School." By this time the boat had left land. "The No Sword School," snorted the other samurai; "I'd like to see your No Sword School," and he drew his sword. But Musashi said, "Wait a minute. This is a crowded boat. If we start a duel, people will get hurt, and they are just innocent bystanders. Let's go to that island over there, and then we can fight it out." So the drunken swordsman said to the ferryman, "Take us over to the island." And the ferryman did. The drunken swordsman was so eager to get out and fight that he jumped onto the sand, and Musashi immediately took the ferryman's oar and pushed the boat back out into the water and left the drunken samurai behind. "You see," he called back as the ferry drifted away, "that is my No Sword School."

If I were to say "Hi," you would say "Hi" back. If I were to say "How are you?" you would say "Fine." There is your original self. But if, in the middle of a normal conversation, I should say, "Why is my hand like Buddha's hand?" how do you handle that one? Once, when a master had asked such a question in such a situation and his disciple had failed to answer, that master had said, "Your answers were quite natural and easy

until now. Why do you feel yourself obstructed when I ask why my hand is like Buddha's hand?"

The disciple was too used to linear thinking to respond naturally. He was used to following just one track. And we are all like that. We are uncomfortable if somebody changes the subject of a conversation without first warning us with a ritualistic transition. We are likewise uncomfortable when we are in the presence of crazy people, who might also change the subject altogether too abruptly, or with drunks, who may not observe the amenities of etiquette in their conversation. We are all hung up on these linear tracks, which is to say, we all have one-track minds.

The master asking a sudden question about his hand wanted a natural, spontaneous answer. When the hands are clapped, the sound issues without hesitation. When flint is struck with steel, the spark comes out at once. That's the kind of response the master had wanted.

One must be spontaneous. At the same time, one must not be in a hurry to provide an answer, because hurrying like that is itself a blocking of the flow of energy. And blocking, in this sense of the word, is exactly what the Buddhist's mean by *attachment*. When they say, "Have no worldly attachment," they don't mean that you are to give up enjoying your dinner. It means you are to give up blocking, you are to get beyond the state in which your flow of energy is interrupted and so proceeds jerkily as if the wheel were made too tight for the axle. We could quite correctly translate *attachment* with the American slang equivalent, *hang-up*. It is a hang-up, therefore, to attempt to arrive at the solution to a problem that demands immediate action by means of reasoning or calculation, which takes us along a linear path, when in reality the problem itself lies in a nonlinear dimension. It can never be solved in a linear fashion

## CHAPTER SIX

because the solution cannot be forced. Neither can we force that curious property that we call beauty, or, for that matter, what we call virtue in human behavior. We know very well when we are in the presence of forced virtue.

Once upon a time, the great tea master Rikyu went to a tea ceremony. And the host was very proud of a new tea caddy that he had bought, which was made of pottery. And Rikyu didn't notice it, or so the host thought, which showed that, because he was looking for it to be noticed, he wasn't quite in tune with the philosophy of tea. Now, I had a friend, a Japanese artist named Sabro Hasegawa, who one day did a calligraphy for me. He took an ordinary, small, Western housepainter's brush about an inch wide, and he did the Chinese characters for one, two, three. That is, one horizontal stroke, two strokes, three strokes. And there was something just fantastic about it. The brush was in places partly dry, so that it produced hairlines of ink instead of solid black. Now, it so happened that a few days later we were due to receive a visit from D. T. Suzuki, the great Zen scholar. And I said, "I am going to hang that picture in my office." And because a fine work of art must fit its surroundings so as not to stand out like a sore thumb, Sabro said, "I hope he won't notice it."

In this same way, Rikyu didn't notice the tea caddy, and this not noticing so bothered its owner that after the tea ceremony was over, he smashed it. However, one of his students knew that it was very valuable, so he collected all its pieces and had it restored, using an old technique in which molten gold is used as cement. When it was finished, you could see the original piece as well as the spidery lines of the gold that was used to restore it. Some time later, a son of the host brought out this mended tea caddy when Rikyu was having tea. And

Rikyu said, “You know, this is most remarkable. When I saw it before it was good, but now it is perfect.” The breaking and restoration of the tea caddy is what one would call a controlled accident, and all great art is a controlled accident. That is to say, it has in it a component of control, but it also has a component of the accidental and the natural. And it is the getting together of those two that is the marvelous thing about art.

It is the same in human relationships. Take the relationship of love. I may be in love and my girlfriend may be a flawlessly beautiful and wonderful person, but if I can control her completely or become immersed in her perfection, I might as well fall in love with a mannequin. However, if she has a little mole on her cheek, or some kind of unpredictability of character, then the accidental has been introduced into the domain of the orderly, and I can enjoy her humanity more easily.

Likewise, when you go into a person’s house and everything is spotless, you feel, by God, you can’t make soup because it will get the kitchen messy. It is just terrible. That home is lacking in a quality that in Arabic is called *baraka*. Now, *baraka* means “grace,” approximately. But *baraka* is also the quality you mean when you say of someone, “He fits like an old shoe.” It’s the quality of a favorite saucepan that is old and dirty but is also marvelous. Or an old pipe that over the years has become very suited to you. It has *baraka*, or grace. So, the challenge for every artist is how to get grace to strike, and how to let an accident happen.

Once there was a sculpture contest at the Art Institute of Chicago, and every entrant was given a cubic foot of plaster of paris to do something with. And the competition was won by a woman who started out by looking at the piece of plaster of paris and saying, “This thing is so perfect, it doesn’t know what it wants to be.”

And so she grabbed it in both hands and flung it onto the floor, and pieces were chipped off and it cracked and so on. Then she looked at it again and said, "Now I know what it wants to be." And so, by following the cracks that she had introduced into it, she made something beautiful. That kind of following the grain is also what you do when you take a Rorschach test. You look at the blotching ink stain—which is the Tao, the primordial, wiggly universe—and then you see something in it. You see an image in it, and what you see is a far more beautiful image than you could ever draw by what we call eidetic vision. So in this way you assist the ink blot or the piece of wood or stone, or whatever it is in which you see that image, to reveal its nature.

Now, experiment for yourselves. When you wake up first thing in the morning, look at the patterns in drapery, or shadows on a wall, and go into that state where you are receptive to seeing images. You will begin to see all kinds of faces and trees and landscapes. Leonardo da Vinci did this. He used to go out and look at a brick wall that had weathered and was covered with splotches of color and all kinds of scratches and so on. Then he would watch it until he saw a vast scene; and he described seeing a whole battle going on, and this became the inspiration for a great mural.

In the same way there was a Chinese Zen monk who had long hair, which was very unusual. He used to drink an enormous amount of wine, and when he was really intoxicated, he'd dip his hair into ink and slosh it over a piece of paper. In the morning, when the ink had dried, he would come back and look at what had happened. As he viewed the strokes, he would put himself into a receptive state of mind, and he would begin to see a landscape with detail after detail fitting into the scheme. And then all he had to do was add little touches

with the brush, to bring it out for everyone else to see. When we go to the cave of Lascaux, and to the other ancient parts of France, and go down and see the prehistoric paintings of animals, it looks very much as if the artists who painted on the cave walls at times followed natural formations in the stone, which had evoked their imagery of wild cattle that are to us inconceivably realistic for people that primitive. But we shall always find that kind of success when artists have not tried to construct the image by themselves but have simply helped those images to emerge.

We create the whole world in that way. We are not aware of this normally, because we are so accustomed to seeing it in the way we see as real and normal. But we can also train ourselves to see things in ways in which they haven't been seen before, and this is what many artists do. For example, in the Western art of seven hundred years ago, there were no landscape painters. Everyone was a portrait painter, or else they painted scenes of the doings of human beings, angels and gods and so forth. Whenever there was landscape in a painting, it was merely as an incidental background. In the course of time artists became fascinated by these background landscapes, and they withdrew the figures and focused on the background. But the first people who saw landscape paintings looked at them and said, "That's not art." Why? Because hitherto they had seen landscapes as insignificant background. It took artists to draw people to the beauty of landscape.

Now, what we are becoming interested in today, and are only just beginning to think about, is soundscape. When we record something, or go to a concert, we have the impression that the focus of our attention is the only thing there. So in radio studios, they cover the walls with soundproof tile in order to keep out the

sound of traffic. The important thing you are supposed to notice is the speech, but the odd thing is, you listen to it back in your home with the windows open and all the street noises coming in, and so really there is no reason those background noises shouldn't be there in the first place.

Let's think of those background noises. Think of that soundscape. Think of the hum that is going on behind all the things that we are doing. You can realize that it is very beautiful and learn to see the texture in those background noises, just as we learned to appreciate the beauty in landscape.

There was a school of musical composers, represented by John Cage, who treated us to background noise and to silent concerts in which the concert consisted of the sound of turning pages and noises occurring spontaneously in the auditorium. Now, you may say that that is not music. But who knows? The world is composed of many things. It is a humscape, a landscape, a skyscape. Over thousands of years, the socially important people have decided what parts of it are to be noticed. They told their children what to notice, and we still do this today. When a child is playing with mud or food and making little patterns, we feel the child is doing something unimportant, so we discourage it and tell the child to learn to use a pencil. When the child points to something and says, "What is that?" we say "A table!" but the child replies, "No, that," and we say "It is wood." But the child was pointing at an irregular pattern on the table, a small change in color that we have no name for and so we say, "Oh, don't be silly; that doesn't matter." So in this way we are all taught the official interpretation of the cosmic Rorschach blot.

This interpretation is based on certain criteria, such as the idea that you must survive. It is your duty to

live, but that duty puts you into a quandary. It says that you are required to do the spontaneous, and this is a double bind, because it says your duty is to be spontaneous because all life is spontaneous. So, everybody is conflicted by this.

The world that we see is a creation of eidetic imagery. We select the human concerns as the significant areas. In a way, this is our answer to the cosmic Rorschach test. So, in that manner we have performed maya, the world illusion. But *maya* also means “art,” and it also means “magic.” Therefore, the magical evocation of the world of things from the formless world—which means from the world of pure Tao that simply wiggles—*that* is the real creation of the world.



# ALAN WATTS AUDIO COLLECTIONS

Original Live Recordings  
from Electronic University

USING STATE-OF-THE-ART technology, Electronic University has captured and enhanced the natural sound from the original recordings so that the insights from one of this century's most notable philosophers come through as clearly as the day Alan Watts first spoke them.

## The Tao of Philosophy — Volume I

ISBN 1-882435-10-9

- ❑ *Slices of Wisdom*—Notable segments drawn from the first thirteen weeks of the *Love of Wisdom* public radio series. (29 min.)
- ❑ *Images of God*—Watts explores the metaphysics underlying feminine symbolism in images of the divine throughout the world, in which “the deep” and “the dark” are recognized as the unifying ground of being. (29 min.)
- ❑ *Sense of Nonsense*—Recorded live on KPFA, this popular program is a delightful excursion into the essential purposelessness of life. (29 min.)
- ❑ *Coincidence of Opposites*—Just as the purpose of dancing is not to arrive at a certain place on the floor, life has no concrete goal to be achieved. (29 min.)
- ❑ *Seeing Through the Net*—In a sparkling 1969 talk to IBM systems engineers, Watts describes the “net” of perception we throw over reality, and the contrasting perceptions of “prickles” and “goo.” (58 min.)

## The Tao of Philosophy — Volume II

ISBN 1-882435-11-7

- ❑ *Myth of Myself*—What do we mean when we use the word *I*? Could self-image be the barrier to knowing who and what we really are? (42 min.)
- ❑ *Man and Nature*—Western culture sees the world as a mechanical system, while Eastern philosophies see it as an all-encompassing organic process. Just as an apple tree “apples,” the earth “peoples,” and we are not so much born into this world as grown out of it. (56 min.)
- ❑ *Symbols and Meaning*—As symbols, words point to things they represent, and thus have meaning. By contrast, life itself does not stand for anything else and therefore has no meaning in the usual sense. (29 min.)
- ❑ *Limits of Language*—Watts suggests that language may alter our view of reality, and by knowing the limits of language we can move on to the unspeakable. (29 min.)

## The Philosophies of Asia — Volume I

ISBN 1-882435-12-5

- ❑ *Relevance of Oriental Philosophy*—Alan Watts looks at Eastern thought in contrast with the religions of the Western world. Chinese and Indian models are used to point out how we can better understand our own culture by contrasting it with others. (56 min.)
- ❑ *Mythology of Hinduism*—An engaging overview of the Hindu perspective on the universe, its theory of time, and the concept of an underlying godhead that is dreaming all of us. (54 min.)
- ❑ *EcoZen*—Speaking before a college audience, Watts points out that “ecological awareness” and “mystical experience” are different ways of saying the same thing. (29 min.)
- ❑ *A Ball of Hot Iron*—Continuing an introduction toward the understanding of Zen Buddhism, Watts describes the essential unity of the organism and its environment. (29 min.)

## The Philosophies of Asia — Volume II

ISBN 1-882435-13-3

❑ *Intellectual Yoga*—In a lively discussion of the intellect as a path to one's enlightenment, Watts observes that "it is amazing how many things there are that aren't so." (42 min.)

❑ *Introduction to Buddhism*—Buddhism is traced from its origins in India to China, and then on to Japan. Along the way Watts brings to life one of the world's great religious traditions in its many forms, from the Theravada school to contemporary Zen. (58 min.)

❑ *Taoist Way of Karma I*—The word *karma* literally means "doing," and is thus "your doing" or action. Taoism suggests a spontaneous course of action in accord with the current and grain of nature. (29 min.)

❑ *Taoist Way of Karma II*—By following the Tao, or course of nature, one comes into harmony with the world and drops out of the cycles of karma perpetuated by our attempts to control destiny. (29 min.)

## Myth and Religion

Each of these six controversial lectures challenges listeners to go beyond their usual mindsets to startling revelations about our most deep-rooted intellectual constructs. Not for the faint of heart!

❑ Not What Should Be, Not What Might Be,  
But What Is! (58 min.)

❑ Spiritual Authority (58 min.)

❑ Jesus: His Religion, or the Religion  
About Him? (58 min.)

❑ Democracy in the Kingdom of Heaven (58 min.)

❑ Image of Man (58 min.)

❑ Religion and Sexuality (58 min.)

## **Buddhism —The Religion of No-Religion**

In a variety of settings from Kyoto to Sausalito, Alan Watts joyfully takes us on a journey to Buddhism, from its roots in India to the explosion of interest in Zen and the Tibetan tradition in the West.

- ☐ The Journey from India I (29 min.)
- ☐ The Journey from India II (29 min.)
- ☐ Buddhism as Dialogue (58 min.)
- ☐ Following the Middle Way (58 min.)
  
- ☐ Religion of No-Religion (58 min.)
- ☐ Wisdom of the Mountains (58 min.)
- ☐ Transcending Duality (29 min.)
- ☐ Diamond Web (29 min.)

## **Counter-Culture Series**

- ☐ **Eastern and Western Zen**—Zen Stories (50 min.); Uncarved Block, Unbleached Silk (44 min.); Biting the Iron Bull (45 min.); Swimming Headless (51 min.); Wisdom on the Ridiculous (46 min.); Zen Bones (59 min.)
- ☐ **Philosophy and Society**—Veil of Thoughts (56 min.); Divine Madness (58 min.); We as Organism (58 min.); What Is Reality? (50 min.); Mysticism and Morality (58 min.); On Being God (60 min.)
- ☐ **Comparative Philosophy**—From Time to Eternity (55 min.); The Cosmic Drama (58 min.); Philosophy of Nature (50 min.); Spectrum of Love (58 min.); Game of Yes and No (50 min.); The Smell of Burnt Almonds (58 min.)

THE TAO OF PHILOSOPHY, VOLUMES I & II and THE PHILOSOPHIES OF ASIA VOLUMES I & II each consist of three audio cassettes in an attractive bookshelf binder. The price for each volume is \$29.95. Please add \$3.00 per item for shipping.

MYTH AND RELIGION, BUDDHISM, PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY, EASTERN AND WESTERN ZEN, and COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY each consist of six audio cassettes in an attractive bookshelf binder. The regular list price for each series is \$59.95. However, you may select any two series for \$100, or all 42 tapes for \$300.

Please add \$3.00 per set for priority mail, \$12.00 per set for overnight mail, or \$8.00 per set for overseas shipping. Visa, MasterCard, and American Express accepted. To order please call or write:

**Electronic University**

Post Office Box 2309  
San Anselmo, CA 94979  
(800) 969-2887

## Other Books in the “Love of Wisdom” Library

Each book consists of an introduction by Mark Watts and the edited transcripts of lectures given by Alan Watts.

Each book is 4<sup>3/4</sup> x 8<sup>1/2</sup> • Hardcover • U.S. \$16.95

### BUDDHISM: THE RELIGION OF NO-RELIGION

In this dynamic series of lectures, Alan Watts takes us on an exploration of Buddhism, from its roots in India to the explosion of interest in Zen and the Tibetan tradition in the West.

112 pages • 0 8048 3056 8

### MYTH AND RELIGION

Although he is best known as a masterful interpreter of Eastern thought, Alan Watts is also recognized as a brilliant commentator on Judeo-Christian traditions.

128 pages • 0 8048 3055 X

### THE PHILOSOPHIES OF ASIA

This book combines the transcripts of eight talks by Alan Watts from 1965 to 1972. Topics range from the relevance of Oriental philosophy to discussions of Hinduism, Yoga, Zen, Buddhism, and Taoism.

128 pages • 0 8048 3051 7

### THE TAO OF PHILOSOPHY

This book covers the edited transcripts of eight talks from 1960 to 1973, offering Watts's insights on philosophical topics, reflecting his underlying appreciation for the wisdom inherent in the course and current of nature.

128 pages • 0 8048 3052 5

For a complete catalog call or write to:

Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc.

RR1 Box 231-5

North Clarendon, VT 05759-9700

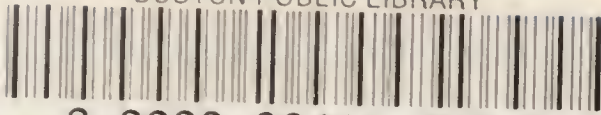
phone: (802) 773-8930

fax: (802) 773-6993

or call toll free: (800) 526-2778



BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 03411 797 6

**WITHDRAWN**

No longer the property of the  
Boston Public Library.

Sale of this material benefits the Library

**WITHDRAWN**

No longer the property of the  
Boston Public Library.

Sale of this material benefits the Library

BAKER & TAYLOR

ALAN WATTS was born in England in 1915 and received his early education at King's School, Canterbury and at the Buddhist Lodge (London) where he met D.T. Suzuki. He received a master's degree from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Illinois and an honorary doctorate of divinity from the University of Vermont. He wrote his first book, *The Spirit of Zen*, at the age of twenty and went on to write over twenty other books including *The Way of Zen*, *The Wisdom of Insecurity* and *The Book*. In addition to being an acclaimed author and philosopher, Dr. Watts was also an Episcopalian minister, professor, graduate-school dean and research fellow of Harvard University. By the early 1960s, he moved to Sausalito, California and held seminars and lectures throughout the United States. Alan Watts died in 1973.

---

Also available in The "Love of Wisdom" Library  
by Alan Watts

THE PHILOSOPHIES OF ASIA  
THE TAO OF PHILOSOPHY  
MYTH AND RELIGION  
BUDDHISM: THE RELIGION OF NO RELIGION

Jacket design by Sherry Fatla

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc.  
Boston • Rutland, Vermont • Tokyo

This book will introduce a new generation to Watts's lucid and readable re-creation of Eastern philosophies. . .

—Booklist review of *The Philosophies of Asia*

. . . although his famous voice and happy laughter are missing now, his penetrating vision remains, and his lectures become brilliant prose in book form.

—Publishers Weekly review of *Buddhism: The Religion of No Religion*

---

*Taoism: Way Beyond Seeking* is a companion to the Alan Watts "Love of Wisdom" audio series heard nationally on public radio.

ISBN 0-8048-3058-4



9 780804 830584

9 0000

