**NOTES FROM: *Out of Your Mind*, by Alan Watts**

**SUMMARY: Alan Watts is one of my biggest intellectual influences of all time, and I'm well on my way to reading everything he's ever written about the fundamental nature of existence, Zen, the art of living, and going *with* the flow of life instead of resisting it and fighting back against it.**

**The dream of life can be a pleasant dream, and a lot of our suffering is self-inflicted because we ignore the true nature of reality. Just as you can't have a front without a back, or shapes with solids, life can't exist without death, and happiness wouldn't exist if we didn't also know sadness. This is the interplay of life, the dance of maya, and it's been going on forever and ever and ever.**

**We didn't come *into* the world – *we came out of it.* You are something that the universe is "doing," in the same way that a wave is something that the whole ocean is doing. You are not separate from life – from the billions and billions of people who have lived, died, and will live in the future, from the stars and the galaxies, from the oceans and the mountains. You – the real You – are all of it, intimately connected with everything that exists, and life can be a marvelous adventure if we relax, ease into existence, and affirm our lives and the lives of everyone else as fundamentally important to its total functioning.**

**This, unsurprisingly, is a radical idea, and it seems crazy to some people, but it's been recognized for thousands of years as reflecting our true human situation. Sometimes, to become sane you have to go "out of your mind," and escape what you thought you knew about reality and the structure of being.**

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"I find it odd that here in the United States, citizens of a democracy still hold to such a monarchical theory of the universe."

"These forms of Christianity share an autocratic view of the nature of the universe, so the architecture of their churches reflects that view. The Catholic version builds everything around the *king,* whereas the Protestant church is designed around the *judge*. But when you try to apply these images to the universe itself – to the very nature of life – you find them very limiting."

"In popular speech, we say, 'I came into the world,' but we didn't – we came *out* of the world."

"I want to propose a different idea. Let's start with the big bang, the theory that billions of years ago, there was a primordial explosion that flung all these galaxies and stars into space. Let's just say for the sake of argument that was the way it happened. It's like someone took a bottle of ink and smashed it against a wall – the ink spread from the big splash in the middle, and out on the edges you have all of these fine droplets in complicated patterns. Just like that, there was a big bang at the beginning of things, and it spread out through space, and you and I are sitting here as complicated human beings way out on the fringes of that initial explosion. If you think that you are something that exists inside your own skin, you will define yourself as one complicated, tiny curlicue among others out on the edge of space.

Maybe billions of years ago, you were part of that big bang, but now you aren't – you're something separate. But it's only because you've cut yourself off; it all depends on how you define yourself. And here's my alternative idea: If there was a big bang at the beginning of time, you are not something that is the *result* of that explosion at the end of the process. You *are* the process. You are the big bang. You are the original force of the universe manifesting as whoever you are in the moment. You define yourself as Mr. or Mrs. or Ms. So-and-So, but you're actually the primordial energy of the universe that's still in process. It's just that you learned to define yourself as something separate."

"You and I are as continuous with the physical universe as a wave is continuous with the ocean. The ocean *waves,* the universe *peoples.* But we have been hypnotized – literally hypnotized – into feeling and sensing that we exist as separate entities inside our own skin. We don't identify with the original big bang – we think we are just something out on the end of it. So we're all scared stiff. Because our wave is going to disappear, and we're going to die, and that's going to be just awful."

"If there is any such thing as intelligence or love or beauty, you find it in other people. Those things exist in human beings, and if they exist in us, it means that intelligence and love and beauty are symptomatic of the scheme of things."

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

"After people die, other people are born, and they're all you. It's just that you can only experience one life at a time. Wherever beings exist throughout all the galaxies, you are all of them – when they come into being, that's *you* coming into being. You don't remember the past in the same way that you don't have to think about how to make your thyroid work. You don't know how to shine the sun, you just do it, just as you breathe without thinking about it. Doesn't this astonish you? That you're this fantastically complex thing, that you're performing all these seemingly impossible functions without any education in how to do it? You're a miracle. The point is that from a strictly physical, scientific standpoint, this organism is a continuous energy with everything else that's going on. If I am my foot, I am the sun. And yet we persist with our little, partial view: 'No, I'm just something *in* this body. I'm just this ego.' What a joke. The ego is nothing other than the focus of conscious attention. It's like radar on a ship – it's a trouble-shooter. Conscious attention is a designed function of the brain to scan the environment for trouble. And if you identify yourself as the trouble-shooter, you define yourself as living in a perpetual state of anxiety. The moment you cease to identify with the ego and become aware that you are the whole organism, you realize how harmonious it all is. Your organism is a miracle of harmony. All these things functioning together – even miniscule creatures fighting each other in your bloodstream and eating each other up. If they weren't doing that, you wouldn't be healthy. What appears to be discord on one level is harmony at a higher level.

All the discord in your life and in the lives of others – at a higher level of the universe, all of that is healthy and harmonious. Everything you are and do at that higher level is magnificent and free of blemish, just like patterns in waves, markings in marble, or the rippling movements of a cat. The world is really okay, and it couldn't be anything else. Otherwise, it couldn't exist. *Physical* and *spiritual* are out-of-date categories. It's all a process. There isn't *stuff* on one had and *form* on the other – it's just *pattern.* Life is pattern; it's a dance of energy. I don't claim to have any private revelations about this. I don't have any mystical knowledge about any higher vibratory plane. All this is standing right in front of you. It's just a question of how you look at it. When you realize this, the most extraordinary thing happens. Some people will use the symbolism of God as a brilliant light, only somehow veiled, hiding underneath all the forms you see. But the truth is actually funnier than that – you're looking at the brilliant light right now. The experience you're having right now – which you might call ordinary, everyday consciousness – is *it.* And when you find that out, you laugh yourself silly. That's the great discovery. In other words, when you really start to see things and you look at an old paper cup, you realize that old paper cup is the brilliant light of the cosmos. Nothing could be brighter – ten thousand suns couldn't be brighter."

"Every one of us is marvelous and complicated and interesting and gorgeous just as we are. Really take a look into another person's eyes. They are jewelry beyond compare – just beautiful!"

"Individual mountains stick out of the earth, but there's a fundamental earth underneath all mountains. So all of us are different things that stick out of reality, but there's a continuity underneath, and we ignore that – that's the thing we leave out."

"So, in actuality, a person who dies is honorable, because he or she is making room for others on the planet. Nothing else is workable."

"It's a far more amusing arrangement for nature to continue the process of life through different individuals than by doing it through the same individuals forever.

"When we look at life in terms of survival and profit, we miss out on the magic."

"You yourself create all the authorities that you accept."

"If you think you have a lower self – or an ego to get rid of – and you fight against it, nothing strengthens the delusion that it exists more than that. So this tremendous schizophrenia in humans – of thinking they are rider and horse, soul in command of body, a will that must control passions, and so on – this kind of split thinking simply aggravates the problem. We just get more and more split. Thinking this way just results in an interior conflict that will never, never get resolved. You either know the true self or you don't, and if you do know it, then this thing we call the lower self ceases to be a problem, because it's just a mirage. Well, you don't go around hitting at mirages with a stick or trying to put reins on them. You just know they're mirages and walk right through them."

“In the process of growth, the oak is not better than the acorn. The oak is just an acorn’s way of becoming more acorns.”

“When we first encounter Zen masters, they initially come across as extremely authoritarian figures. That is, they put on a terrific show of being an awful dragon, because this screens out people who don’t have the nerve to get into the work. But once you make it past this, a very interesting change takes place. The master becomes more like a brother or sister. They become an affectionate helper, and the students love the master as they would a close sibling, as opposed to respecting the master as they would a parent. And the students and masters make jokes about each other – they enjoy a very curious kind of social relationship. It has all the outward trappings of being authoritarian, but everybody on the inside knows what a joke this is. See, liberated people have to be very cool. Otherwise, a society that doesn’t really believe in equality and can’t possibly practice it would consider this kind of relationship a threat. It would be viewed as extremely subversive. So Zen masters wear all this purple and gold and carry scepters and sit on thrones. The outside world looks at that and thinks, ‘Okay, they’re all right. They have discipline and order, so they must be fine.’”

“It isn’t that there’s only one self in a solipsistic way. Solipsism is the idea that you are the only person who exists and everybody else is your dream. Nobody can prove that this isn’t the case, but I’d like to see a congress of solipsists arguing as to which one of them is really there.”

“But just as you don’t notice what your pineal gland is doing right at this moment, you don’t notice the connections that tie us all together – not only here and now, but forever and ever and ever.”

“Anything you can formulate, imagine, or picture will not be the self, so in order to know the self, you must get rid of every idea in your head. This doesn’t mean to get rid of every sense impression and enter a catatonic state of total absorption. Full moksha is when you come back out of meditative absorption and see this everyday world just as it looks now, but you clearly see that it is all the self. You become aware of the tremendous interconnectedness of everything. You see that everything goes together, which is what we mean by relativity. Relativity means relatedness – fronts go with backs, tops go with bottoms, insides with outsides, solids with spaces. Everything goes together. And it makes no difference if something lasts a long time or a short time – a galaxy goes together with all the universe just as much as a mosquito.”

“Even though the audience knows that what they see on stage is only a play, the actor’s skill takes them in – they weep and laugh and sit on the edge of their seats with anticipation. They’re utterly involved is what they really know is just a play. So that’s what’s going on here. Brahman is a tremendous actor with absolutely superb technique, so much so that Brahman takes itself in and feels that the play is real. We are all the Brahman acting our own parts and playing the human game so beautifully that Brahman is enchanted, and this is what enchantment means – under the influence of a chant, hypnotized, spellbound, fascinated. And that fascination is maya.”

“The secret to waking up from the drama – all these endless cycles – is to realize that only the present exists. It’s the only time there is. And when you become awake to that, boredom ends, and you are delivered from the cycles – not in the sense that they disappear, but that you no longer go through them. Well, you *do* go through them, but you realize they’re not going anywhere. And you don’t even try to hurry up and get to the end of it all faster, because just like music, the point of listening isn’t to get to the end of the piece – you can sit back with interest and let it all be. You can look at every little detail of life in a new way, saying, ‘Oh! Look at that!’ By living totally here and now, one’s eyes are opened in astonishment.”

“There is no method to arrive at the place where you already are.”

“You are as much the dark space beyond death as you are the light interval called life. These are just two sides of you – you are the total wave. Just as you can’t have half a wave, you can’t have half a human being – that is, someone who is born and doesn’t die. That would only be half a thing.”

“We aren’t the static observer. We are the flow.”