

<https://www.alanwatts.org/1-1-8-myth-of-myself-pt-2/>

[Note Spotlight metaphor begins on page 2]

As we study man or any other living organism and try to describe him accurately and scientifically, we find that our normal sensation of ourselves as isolated egos inside a bag of skin is a hallucination. It really is it's absolutely nutty, because when you describe human behavior, or the behavior of a mouse or a rat or a chicken or anything you want to describe, you find that as you try to describe its behavior accurately, you must also describe the behavior of its environment. Supposing I walk and you want to describe the action of walking, you cannot talk about my walking without also describing the floor, because if you do not describe the floor and the space in which I am moving all you will be describing is somebody swinging his legs in empty space. So as to describe my walking, you must describe the space in which you find me. You know, you couldn't see me unless you could also see my background, what stands behind me. See, if I myself, if the boundaries of my skin were coterminous with your whole field of vision you would not see me at all. You would see my bright, red vest instead. That's why put it on this evening and to demonstrate this point. And that would be the thing that filled your field of vision, that was the thing standing there, you would not see me, because in order to see me you have to see not only what is inside the boundary of my skin, but you have to see what is outside it too.

Now, that is terribly important. Really, the fundamental, ultimate mystery – the only thing you need to know to understand the deepest metaphysical secrets – is this: that for every outside there is an inside and for every inside there is an outside, and although they are different, they go together. There is, in other words, a secret conspiracy between all insides and all outsides, and the conspiracy is this: to look as different as possible, and yet underneath to be identical. Because you do not find one without the other. Like Tweedledum and Tweedledee agreed to have a battle. Note that – agreed. So there is a secret: what is esoteric, what is profound, and what is deep is what we will call the “implicit.” What is obvious and in the open is what we will call the “explicit.” And I and my environment, you and your environment are explicitly as different as different could be, but implicitly you go together. And this is discovered by the scientist, when he tries, with the whole art of sciences describe what happens exactly, when he describe exactly what you do, he finds out that you, your behavior, is not something that can be separated from the behavior of the world around you. He realizes then that you are something that the whole world is doing, just as when the sea has waves on it, all right, you see is the ocean is waving. So each one of us is a “waving” of the whole cosmos, the entire works, all there is, and with each one of us it is waving and saying, “Yoo-hoo! Here I am!”, only does it differently each time, because variety is the spice of life.

But you see, the funny thing is we have not been brought up to feel that way. Instead of feeling that we, each one of us, are something that the whole realm of being is doing, we feel that we are something that has come into the whole realm of being as a stranger. When we were born we do not really know where we came from because we do not remember, and we think when we die that is just going to be that. Some people console themselves with the idea that they are going to Heaven, or that

they are going to be reincarnated, summer land or something you know, but people don't really believe that. For most people it is implausible, and the real thing that haunts them is that when they die they will go to sleep and are never going to wake up. They are going to be locked up in the safe deposit box of darkness forever. But that all depends, you see, upon a false notion of what is one's self. Now, the reason why we have this false notion of ourselves is, as far as I can understand it, that we have specialized in one particular kind of consciousness. Being very general, rough, we have two kinds of consciousness. One I will call the "spotlight," and the other the "floodlight." The spotlight is what we call conscious attention, and that is trained into us from childhood as the most valuable form of consciousness. When the teacher in class says, "Pay attention!" everybody stares, and looks right at the teacher (like that). That is spotlight consciousness; fixing your mind on one thing at a time. Concentrate, and even though you may not be able to have a very long attention span, nevertheless you concentrate, you use your spotlight: one thing after another, one thing after another, flip, flip, flip, flip, flip, like that. But we also have another kind of consciousness which I call the floodlight. For example, you can drive your car for several miles with a friend sitting next to you, and your spotlight consciousness will be completely absorbed in talking to your friend. Nevertheless, your floodlight consciousness will manage the driving of the car, will notice all the stoplights, the other idiots on the road, and so on, and you will get there safely without even thinking about it.

But our culture has taught us to specialize in spotlight consciousness, and to identify ourselves with that form of consciousness alone. "I am my spotlight consciousness, my conscious attention; that is my ego; that is me." And very largely we ignore the floodlight. The floodlight consciousness is working all the time, every nerve end that we have is its instrument. You know, you can go out to a luncheon or something, and you sit next to Mrs. So-and-So, and you go home and your wife says to you,

"Was Mrs. So-and-So there?"

"Yes, I sat next to her."

"Well, what was she wearing?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

You saw, but you did not notice. Now, because we have been brought up to identify ourselves with the spotlight consciousness, and the floodlight consciousness is undervalued, we have the sensation of ourselves as being just the spotlight, just the ego that looks and attends to this and that and the other. And so we ignore and are unaware of the vast, vast extent of our being. People, who by various methods become fully aware of their floodlight consciousness, have what is called "a mystical experience" or a cosmic consciousness or what the Buddhists call bodhi, awakening. The Hindus call it moksha, liberation, because they discover that the real deep, deep self, that which you really are, fundamentally and forever, is the whole of being – all that there is, the works, that is you. Only that universal self that is you has a capacity to focus itself at ever so many different here-and-nows. So, when you use the word "I", as William James said "is really a word of position like 'this,' or 'here'." Just as a sun or star has many rays, so the whole cosmos expresses itself in you and you and you, in all the different variations. It plays games: it plays the John Doe game, the Mary Smith game. It plays the beetle game, the butterfly game, the bird game, the pigeon game, the fish game, the star game.

Just like these are games that differ from each other just like backgammon, whist, bridge, poker, pinochle; or like the waltz, mazurka, minuet, and so on. It dances with infinite variety, but every single dance that it does, that is to say – you – is what the whole thing is doing. But you see, we forget it, we do not know. We are brought up in a special way so that we are unaware of the connection, unaware that each one of us is the works, playing it this way for a while.