

# Dance of Opposites

Excerpt

## Introduction

By Robert Anton Wilson

Every month I receive a pile of books the publishers want me to read and to comment upon. Very, very rarely do I receive one that arouses my enthusiasm as much as the present work, which manages to bring some of the most advanced concepts of Oriental and Occidental mysticism into a framework so down-to-earth that even the allegedly esoteric “unity underlying all opposites”, seems so obvious that you wonder how anyone could ever have overlooked it.

Indeed, the singular achievement of this book consists in making you understand why the human mind must overlook unity once we begin thinking at all, and why we must rediscover it if we continue thinking clearly enough and long enough. Only one other book explains so clearly why we always begin by positing polar opposites and why we must end by reconciling the opposites: G. Spencer Brown’s *Laws of Form*. And, alas, you need some background in mathematical logic and cybernetics to understand Spencer Brown. You just need common sense and an open mind to understand Dr. Scarfalloto.

Dr. Scarfalloto begins with an enlarged Y to illustrate the bifurcation of the nervous system when the brain stem splits into the right and left-brain hemispheres. This hauntingly resembles Dr. Wilhelm Reich’s famous diagram for the bioenergetic unity underlying biology and psychology. And that, in turn, suggests the bottom, or root, of the well-known emblem of medicine, the staff with two intertwined serpents (which appeared in the dream that inspired this book), as Dr. Scarfalloto explains.

In China, the same symbolism appears in the philosophy of the *Tao*, the cosmic energy that always manifests as the opposing forces of *yin* and *yang*.

A symbolism that appears in so many places and times does not belong in the category of “beliefs” or “concepts.” It pre-exists such front-brain abstraction. It comes, rather, from that timeless abyss which Carl Jung called the “collective unconscious,” or from Sheldrake’s “morphic field,” or the “akashic records” of Theosophy—*i.e.*, from a level so deep that we cannot profitably consider its symbols as ideas but only as the preconditioning forms (or archetypes) out of which all of our less primitive images, and eventually abstract ideas, can grow.

Dr. Scarfalloto’s method of reducing all opposites to their underlying unities uses only everyday examples from ordinary human life so that anybody can understand this book. (Few can understand Jung, Sheldrake, Leary, etc.) Consider by contrast the shock tactics of Aleister Crowley: “Nothing is. Nothing becomes. Nothing is not.”

The mind whirls. If one has the taste for this kind of meta-logic, one struggles with Crowley for a long time before understanding what these Strange Loops communicate. Most people lack that taste and give up quickly. Nobody will give up on *The Dance of*

*Opposites*, I suspect. It deals immediately and urgently with our most intimate and painful conflicts and shows us with great clarity how we got into them and how we can work our way out of them again.

A last word: this book seems too good for simple “reading.” Rather, you should keep it handy and re-read a chapter a day for a few years, until you begin to feel deeply the simple path that Dr. Scarfalloto presents.

# Introduction Third Edition

As a way of introducing this third edition to *The Dance of Opposites*, I wish to point out that the first edition was called *The Alchemy of Opposites*. I initially wrote the book in response to a dream, described in the forward of this book.

The dream turned out to be a life changer. After publication of the book, the torrent of information continued. What's more, some of my original ideas would not hold still, but insisted on evolving. One facet of that evolution was the realization that my work was closely related to the Taoist concepts of Yin and Yang. That relationship should have been obvious to me from the start, but it wasn't. In fact, during the months that I was furiously writing down all the cool ideas that came to me after my dream, I never once considered the relation of my work to Yin and Yang. Even after Robert Anton Wilson briefly commented on this, in his introduction to my book, it went right over my head.

Yes, I was peripherally aware of Yin and Yang, as are many individuals in the West. However, I never once focused on their connection to my work. I never said, "Hummm, Taoism, Yin and Yang, opposites; that's what I'm writing about."

Finally, after the book was in print, I made the "discovery." During a conversation with one of my readers, he casually commented that my ideas were very much akin to Taoism. For a moment, I just stood there, sort of stunned and embarrassed, as if he had just informed me that my fly was open.

My oversight is sort of understandable because the ideas I was exploring in my book were based, not so much on my academic study of other works, but rather, personal experience. None-the-less, I was perplexed as to why I didn't at least reflect on the link, while I was writing the original book. In retrospect, it was rather spooky. When the realization finally sank in, I started an intense and prolonged study of Taoism, Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Marshal Arts. I was astounded. "Those crooks," I said, "They stole my stuff – four thousand years ago!"

My initial blindness to the Tao-connection turned out to be blessing, because I was able to contemplate the same core principles described by Taoism, but from a perspective that was free of its language and mental constructs. I was able to freely explore the dance of opposites in ways that I did not encounter in my subsequent exploration of Taoism.

None-the less, when I finally took the time to study Taoism and its practical applications, it was like coming home. Consequently, I absolutely had to write a second edition. I also felt compelled to change the title from *The Alchemy of Opposites* to *The Dance of Opposites*. This reflects the understanding that we do not *make* the opposing qualities within us and around us interact harmoniously, no more than we can order two individuals to love one another. We simply cultivate the ability to recognize how they naturally dance harmoniously. When we do so, we tend to cooperate with that dance, which invites health and happiness, as the ancient Taoists well understood.

So, what is this *third* edition all about? As with the second edition, it incorporates the fruits of my deepening understanding of the subject, while retaining the exuberance, flair and flavor of the original book. In addition, I have rearranged many of the chapters with the intent of promoting clarity and readability.

# Forward

This book was born early one morning when I awoke from a startling dream. The main feature of the dream was a snake. Snakes in dreams are not that unusual, but this creature was thousands of feet long and proportionately wide. And, it had *two* extremely ferocious looking heads.

In the dream, I was flying close to the snake's heads, high in the air among the clouds. The beast undulated in a most menacing manner. Its tail was far below on the ground. The two heads had intense, ravenous eyes. Each mouth was wide open, revealing dagger-like teeth and a sharply forked tongue. In the dream, I also knew that the serpent was extremely venomous. It was obviously capable of annihilating me with no effort at all. In addition, I saw that its power was so great that it could easily swoop down and destroy all of humanity.

Even though I was afraid, I prepared myself to fight. I did so by climbing into a two-headed snake costume, which was going to act as my "battleship." And so, we squared off, ready to do battle, high in the air among the clouds. At that point, I awoke.

For a while, I remained motionless in bed with my eyes closed. Behind my closed eyelids, I still saw the gigantic snake, and I continued sensing its horrific power. Even after I opened my eyes, I continued feeling its deadly presence. I stared at the sky through the window, watching the clouds drift by.

For me, the dream was, to say the least, unprecedented. Still seeing the snake clearly in my mind, I said to myself, "This probably means something."

As the emotional impact of the dream gradually wore off, I took note of my initial impressions as to the meaning of the dream. Later that day, I consulted books and experts to get additional information as to the possible meaning of the symbols of my dream. Not surprisingly, I found no reference to extremely ferocious two-headed snakes of monstrous proportions. So, I went back to my strong initial impressions, which were as follows:

- ❖ The two-headed snake symbolized duality - the dance of opposites. This idea was reinforced by the appearance of the second snake (me in the costume).
- ❖ The humongous size of the snake suggested that the duality in question wasn't merely one particular pair of opposites. It was the granddaddy of dualities, containing within it all other pairs of opposites.
- ❖ The foreboding feeling that the snake was extremely powerful and dangerous suggested that I would either master it or be devoured by it – devoured by the conflicting opposing forces within me.
- ❖ The dreaded fear that the snake could destroy me and all people on Earth suggested that the snake not only symbolized duality within me personally, but also touched into the collective consciousness of humanity. This impression was reinforced by the snake's tremendous size and extremely high altitude above the earth - its two heads ready to swoop down on the population below.
- ❖ The final impression was that if I tried to overpower and destroy the snake, I would surely lose. The message was, *Don't kill it, just understand it*. If this had been an actual snake in the outer world, I would have laughed at such an idea; however, since the snake was a symbol of the opposing forces within my own mind, the idea that I could master it through understanding was reasonable.

## **Duality is Fun...Except When It Isn't**

In the days that followed the dream, my mind was flooded with a variety of opposites. I had the notion that duality is beautiful and that it does not have to be synonymous with conflict. I saw a man and woman dancing, rejoicing in their differences; the strength of him delighting in the grace of her, and the grace of her embracing the strength of him. I then had the frightening and exciting notion that *all opposites* can be experienced in this manner.

When inner duality is *not* fun, it shows up as neurosis, a condition in which opposites are at war within the mind. We set them at war with each other by judging one as good and the other as bad. We then identify ourselves with the one that is judged as good and pretend the other doesn't exist - except maybe in someone else.

External opposites are generally well tolerated. We are not troubled because *up* is the opposite of *down*. We are not emotionally tortured by the fact that *hot* is the opposite of *cold*. We do not lose sleep over the oppositeness of *night* and *day*. However, when the opposites are our own emotions and thoughts, we find it more difficult to just observe them without taking the whole thing personally.

This book addresses those interesting forms of *internal* duality, inner opposites such as truth/lie, hold on/let go, pleasure/pain, forgiveness/vengeance, birth/death, etc.

## **The Big Joke**

With regard to the dancing opposites, the big joke is this: *With any pair of opposites, the side we have judged as inferior is the one that rules us.* This is commonly known principle, even for individuals who are not familiar with how opposites dance. It is the basis for the cliché, "What you resist persists."

Likewise, when we recognize both sides of any duality as partners in the dance of Creation, the inner conflict dies. It does not die, however, as a soldier on a battlefield. It dies as a seed dies when it breaks its shell and germinates. The sprout is the vision of Life wherein opposites make love instead of war. Such a vision leads us naturally to the primordial Unity beyond opposites.

## **Practical Value**

Essentially, there are two ways that we can benefit from this book. One is immediate, and the other is long-term.

**The Immediate Benefit:** Since Creation is a dance of opposites, any aspect of your inner or outer world can be understood more deeply when seen as part of that dance. In that sense, this book is essentially a handbook for understanding various common issues that impact our health and happiness.

**The Long-Term Benefit:** The more deeply we understand the dance of opposites within us, the more we tend to spontaneously "cooperate" with it. Therefore, as suggested above, the long-term benefit of applying the information in this book is that the reader gradually becomes free from the habit of consciously or unconsciously placing opposites at war with one another. By thus setting the mind free of that subtle but perpetual conflict, we deepen our potential for healing and renewal of the body and mind. We also tend to relate more harmoniously with the world around us.

Stated differently, the short-term benefit has to do with the way you think, and the long-term benefit has to do with the way you feel. For example, one specific short-term

benefit is that you might see the usually hidden contradictions and inconsistencies in the behavior of people around you. A specific long-term benefit is the awareness that any such contradictions that you perceive (and react to) in the outer world are, more than likely, reflections of your own inner contradictions. That awareness is usually experienced as a feeling. That feeling is commonly called “compassion.”

In other words, you can simply use this book as a handbook for gaining new perspective on specific subjects or issues that are of interest to you in the moment. In addition, if you make it a habit of looking at life in this manner, your efforts will, more than likely, compel a subtle and gradual evolution or transformation in the deeper, feeling areas of your mind. The more deeply we see and appreciate the dance of opposites within us and around us, the more we invite the vision of Unity beyond opposites.

We will start our journey by asking this question: What is it about the dance of opposites that makes it so fundamentally important to life? This question is answered in Chapter One.