

HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY:

The Zen of Verbal Play

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The idea for our version of Higgledy-Piggledy described in this book originated in March 1977 when a friend of ours organized for us a series of lectures and workshops on the East Coast. After visiting Roanoke, Washington, and Baltimore, we arrived in New York and enjoyed several days of unrivalled hospitality in the Tarrytown Conference Center as guests of its president and our dear friend Bob Schwartz. Bob is a brilliant entrepreneur with a unique sense of humor. A fast and imaginative thinker, entertainer, and an inexhaustible source of old stories and amazing new ideas, he is capable of captivating his audiences for many hours.

We were driving with him in his car, carried away by the fireworks of his mind. As we were passing the sign indicating that we were on highway 9W, Bob shifted in his narrative to the problem of word games. He told us about a game J. F. Kennedy used to play with his friends; the task was to invent a story where the punchline would be a specific chosen word or sentence. If this were, for example "9W", the appropriate solution would be: "**Herr Weiss, do you spell your name with a V?**" "**Nein, W.**"

Following this, Bob suggested that we try a game that he called *Higgledy-Piggledy*. He asked us to describe "*an animal with bad character*" by two words that would rhyme. The answer he had in mind was "**loose mouse**", however, we came with a few alternative solutions: "**foul owl**", "**lobster mobster**", and "**evil weavil**". After a few more challenges, we got fascinated and drawn into the game and started coming with our own examples: "**carob cherub**" for "*imitation chocolate baby angel*"; "**hemming lemming**" for "*a suicidal rodent seamstress working on skirts*", and "**demon semen**" for "*unstoppable spermatozoid with evil intentions*".

Our stay in Tarrytown was just a short break in our busy schedule. After we left, we were facing several additional workshops, seminars, and lectures in various parts of New England, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Our friend Eleanor Briggs offered us generously the use of her beautiful farmhouse in the countryside of New Hampshire as a base for our daily excursions. She

was at the time in New York City and we had the entire estate for ourselves. It is a large seventeenth century farmhouse, renovated with unusual taste and understated elegance, combining the historical charm with all imaginable modern luxuries.

It was a true haven offering a welcomed respite after our intense emotional work with large groups of people. We returned to it every night during our stay in New England, willing to drive a few hours on frozen roads to get there. That gave us ample time to cultivate the legacy of our friend Bob Schwartz and to further develop and refine the game of *Higgledy-Piggledy*; Instead of the original two-word units, we ended up with long accumulations of words. These had nothing in common, except the fact that they rhymed; often even their spelling was drastically different. However, the words brought together on the basis of such an arbitrary and capricious rule evoked often the most bizarre and amusing images, scenes, and sequences.

We soon noticed that playing the game for an extended period of time would bring us into a strange state of mind. It would open for us up a world where the ordinary restrictions of logic were transcended. It was an imaginary realm where various inanimate objects came to life and became protagonists in complex scenes. They were torn by passionate emotions, made love, got married, were jealous, killed each other, and had mental breakdowns. Flowers and trees were involved in scientific research and were awarded Nobel Prizes, they sang in operas, and participated in safaris. Animals talked in different languages, were famous military leaders, and traveled to the moon. The ordinary critical faculties of the intellect and restraints of logic were transcended; it brought a sense of extraordinary playfulness and freedom. Everything that the mind could conceive of that could be described by rhyming words was possible.

Over the years, we have introduced to *Higgledy-Piggledy* many groups of people, interested in consciousness; most of the time this was in the context of our monthlong seminars at the Esalen Institute, around the training modules in Holotropic Breathwork, and in shorter workshops. Esalen hot-tubs and large hot pools in other places where we were conducting Holotropic Breathwork workshops became favorite places for *Higgledy-Piggledy* contests. We have observed repeatedly that large subgroups of people exposed to this game became passionately involved in it and were willing to play it for hours at a time. And they often experienced the same changes that we have ourselves noticed repeatedly: *Higgledy-Piggledy*

tends to introduce people to a cartoon-like world of magic, where anything is possible. At some point, we noticed that this state bears a certain superficial similarity to experiences described in a certain stage of systematic practice of Zen. Although this does not mean that they have the same impact or value, this similarity is very interesting and deserves a brief discussion.

Zen Buddhism and the Zen Circle.

Zen is a school of Buddhism that refuses to follow blindly the doctrines and scriptures and promises to mediate direct transmission of the spirit or essence of Buddha's teachings and the enlightenment that he achieved. The followers of Zen are divided into two major sects that differ considerably in the techniques of spiritual practice. While the *Soto sect* relies almost entirely upon the practice of *zazen* or meditation, the *Rinzai sect* uses a system of specific 'problems for meditation' in the form of questions and answers, or "*koans*". The *koans* are used both as means of opening the student's intuitive mind and as tests of the depth to which it has been opened.

While the teaching methods of the *Soto* and *Rinzai sects* are different, their goals are the same: to transcend the limitations of the intellect, freeing oneself from emotional attachment, and transcending value judgments. Students involved in Zen practice undergo many profound changes in consciousness which are characteristic for the stages of spiritual development. These have been described most succinctly in the famous Zen dictum: "When one embarks on the spiritual journey, at a certain point rivers cease to be rivers and mountains mountains. When the journey is completed, rivers are rivers again and mountains are mountains. "

A more elaborate form of describing the spiritual progression in Zen practice is the series of the "*ox-herding picture.s*" Here the stages of the spiritual path are represented by simple drawings depicting different situations involving a man and an ox. The series begins with the moment when the seeker becomes aware of the possibility of enlightenment and ends by the time when he returns as a sage to the world of everyday life, having renounced personal liberation to help others.

For the purpose of our discussion, we would like to bring attention to another popular Zen diagram, the famous *Zen Circle*, which seems relevant from the point of view of the verbal play described in this book. The *Zen Circle* is a conceptual tool that represents in a graphic form the changes in consciousness that occur in the course of spiritual practice. It is a simple diagram in which the stages of the inner transformation are symbolized by the movement along the circumference of a circle.

The starting point at **0 degrees** represents the ordinary perception and experience of the world dominated by analytical thinking that categorizes everything in terms of form and name. It is the state of mind characterized by thinking in terms of polarities, such as good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, dark-light, beautiful-ugly, male-female, or yours and mine. It leads to value judgments, pursuit of and emotional attachment to that which is desirable, and fear and avoidance of the uncomfortable and unpleasant. The corresponding sense of identity can be described as small I. The logic of this state can be expressed by the mathematical formula $1+2=3$.

The **90 degree** position on the *Zen circle* represents the stage of consciousness evolution where thinking about the trajectory of human existence leads to the discovery of essential identity of form and emptiness: form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Before birth there is nothingness, after birth one has unique individuality, and after death there is again nothingness. At this level, the world is full of things with different forms and names, but ultimately they are all the same - they come from nothingness and they will return into nothingness. The corresponding sense of identity is described as Karma I. The mathematical formula applicable to this stage is $0=1$, $1=0$.

The **180 degree** position stands for the state of consciousness where the entire world of forms appears as illusory and nothing really exists. In sharp contrast with the preceding two stages, there is no thinking at all and no access to words and language. This stage is characterized by true emptiness and attachment to it. There are no mountains, no rivers, no God, no Buddha, nothing at all. The corresponding sense of identity is Nothing I and the mathematical logic of this state $1x1=0$, $1x100=0$.

At **270 degrees**, everything that the mind can conceive of is possible; it has transcended all the limitations of conventional logic and hindrances of space and time. In this mode, sometimes called "live thinking", there is complete freedom and attachment to it; it is a realm of magic and miracles. The Korean Zen master Seung Sahn says about this stage: "Here I can change my body into a snake's, I can ride a cloud to the Western Heaven. I can walk on water. If I want life, I have life; if I want death, I have death. In this area, a statue can cry, the ground is not dark or light, the tree has no roots, and the valley has no echo." The corresponding identity is Freedom I and the mathematical formula for this stage is $1+2=3,000, 100 \times 1,000 = 4$.

The end of the spiritual journey is symbolized by the **360 degree** point of the Zen circle, which is also the **O degree point**. The difference is that the state at 0 degrees is characterized by attachment thinking, whereas at 360 degrees, there is no attachment. This situation has a psychological correspondence in the fact that this state is in some ways the same as at the beginning of the spiritual journey, yet in another sense distinctly different. Compare this with the passage from T. S. Eliot's Four Quartet's:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

This difference is seemingly subtle, but actually very profound. One returns to the ordinary world, but sees it without value judgment, just as it is. This direct perception and experience of the "suchness" of existence results in intuitive action: one acts appropriately in all situations and under all circumstances, without the distortion by desire or aversion. The mind is like a clear mirror, reflecting everything just as it is. There is no life and no death, since time and space are infinite. The corresponding sense of identity is the Big I and the descriptive mathematical formula is $3 \times 3 = 9$.

The objective of Zen practice is to reach the 360 degree state of consciousness. At this point, even the distinctions between the states represented by the different positions on the circle disappear; one realizes that the diagram does not have an absolute and independent reality and is nothing but a useful teaching device.

As we mentioned earlier, the state of consciousness induced by extended involvement in *Higgledy-Piggledy* seems to bear a certain superficial resemblance with the situation described at the 270 degree point of the Zen Circle. It seems that playing the game in a focused way might give the player a taste of what the Zen student experiences at this stage of practice. Beside and beyond that, playing *Higgeldy-Piggeldy* can provide many hours of intelligent, imaginative, and hilarious entertainment.

Examples.

Food served by a famous chain of hotels to participants in low decibel city uprisings.
Quiet riot Hyatt diet

A light-weight boxing champion who is destroying indiscriminately the houses of the Eskimo with the use of a flamethrower.

Helter skelter shelter melter welter

A rare gourmet mushroom with a corrugated aristocratic collar made of Belgian fabric who utters incomprehensible words while mixing the cards.

Ruffle duffel shuffle muffle truffle

A soldier using first-class equipment to dispose of excrement.

Super duper pooper scooper trooper

A febrile disease caused by wounds inflicted by kitchen utensils and occurring in rodents who shifted from aquatic architecture to production of fabrics.

Beaver weaver cleaver fever

The shine that Indians who decimated federal troops achieve by removing microscopic particles of soil from shoes.

Custer-buster duster luster

A more expedient expert sculptor working with white material that requires drying.
Faster master plaster caster

A disgraceful affair involving destruction of shoes by thugs using wax-covered metal objects.
Candle handle sandal vandal scandal

A monk who fell into the ocean while collecting with his colleague from the bottom of the ocean oysters bred by his monastery.

Moister cloister oyster hoister

An important obese member of the Vatican soccer or ice hockey team.

Rolly polly holy goalie

An unusual German pasta desert made by a fancy dog who was produced by chaotic movements of a pencil.

Doodle poodle noodle strudel

An outlet leasing chewing aids to nitrogen-rich vegetables suffering from psychiatric disorders.

Mental lentil dental rental

A party where bachelor miniature bells mill around and mix up until they start experiencing prickling sensations.

Single gingle tingle mingle

A strange looking rabbit who deals with solar currency and liquid insect products.

Sunny money runny honey funny bunny

A sneaky long-distance killer and poisonous snake charmer wearing superior protection for his incontinence.

Hyper diaper viper piper sniper

A gambling jargon of Australian canine newcomers to Mexico who belong to one of the Beatles.

Ringo Gringo dingo Bingo lingo

A meteorological disturbance caused by a sorcerer-taylor who lives on reptilian entrails.

Lizzard guizzard scissored wizard blizzard

A reckless businessman who steals shamans from aboriginal tribes and sells them at exorbitant prices.

Wheeler-dealer healer stealer

An office issuing measured supplies of food to inhabitants of a large Caribbean Island.

Haitian nation ration station

A creole soup with many incompatible ingredients cooked by a famous Walt Disney character.

Dumbo mumbo jumbo gumbo

Ambiable farmer's gift involving a beautiful forest bird

Pleasant peasant pheasant present

An animal armored knight resting on a pile of garbage and emitting plaintive sounds of passerine birds.

Bitter twitter litter sitter critter ritter.

A fake conserved corpse with a good-tasting abdomen.

Yummy tummy dummy mummy

An innocent white flower suffering from involuntary spells of undignified puerile behavior.

Willy-nilly silly lily

A lecherous Greek mythological character with sexual attraction for betrayers and hostile feelings toward volcanoes.

Traitor mater crater hater satyr waiter.

Electrically charged particles containing a large Israeli feline and floating around a crucified Monty Python Messiah.

Zion lion Bryan ion

A small sneaky predator-painter suffering from a child disease and using petroleum-propelled motorized equipment

Measle diesel easle weasel

A symptom of fatigue and sleepiness in a framed canvas overhang on an early morning when fish are busy with reproductive activities.

Spawning dawning awning yawning.

A fastidious dresser with an expediently placed bottle of booze, lying on a seashore.

Handy brandy sandy dandy.

A Welsh revolver made of expensive glass.

Bristol crystal pistol

A chubby malodorous simian drug addict.

Funky chunky monkey junkie

Cheap and gaudy, cantankerous, and gangling (lean and slim) American.

Hanky panky cranky lanky yankee

An individual who cruises the Sea of Tranquillity while exposing his naked buttocks and humming sentimental songs.

Lunar schooner mooner crooner

A dirigible air ship full of vigorous gnomes belonging to a weak and impotent guardian of prostitutes.

Limp vimp pimp gimp imp blimp

A dyspeptic man who was sacrificed and later revered because he tried to swamp an American president for a sealed document issued by a famous existentialist philosopher.

Sartre Charter-Carter barter farter martyr

A sea captain's observation that his cargo of drinkable cosmetics shifts every time the waves hit the ship.

Ocean motion lotion potion notion

Fainting of water fowls that occurs during full moon and is synchronous with population explosion among garbage loving carnivores involved in the practice of ancient Nordic soothsaying.

Loon moon swoon rune coon boon

Certain unexplained and enigmatic changes in facial expression and sucking patterns of infants cuddled by their mothers.

Nuzzle muzzle guzzle puzzle

A song of a considerably obnoxious but strong and whimsical feline infant.
Pretty shitty gritty witty kitty ditty.

A chronically complaining, bothersome, and licentious orderly in care of four-wheelers.

Stretcher fetcher quetcher lecher

Liquid used in a machine duplicating male genitals by an isolated quetcher

Loner moaner boner cloner toner.

Changes of the surface of a lake caused by a human oddity who was born with three mammary glands.

Triple nipple cripple ripple

Water dripping from a Communist banner carried by a promiscuous processed vegetable worth five cents.

Fickle nickel pickle sickle trickle.

A film for educators involving alien clergy.

Creature preacher teacher feature.

Tetanic spasm of the jaws inflicting soldiers defending the ditches of the Maginot line which is caused by the odor of the stools on which military prostitutes satiate their sexual thirst.

French trench wench quench bench stench clench

An important item of the pants of a famous New York publisher known for its enormous appetite for sheep.

Mutton glutton Dutton button

Ancient Mesopotamian hearsay linking cancer to excessive laughter.

Humor tumor Sumer rumor

An examiner and assessor of the talent of clowns or bafoons who searches for the Biblical roots of the Jewish Purim holiday and annoys the inhabitants of a British city.

Ester quester Leicester fester jester tester

Folklore about painful ulcerations afflicting prostitutes hanging around entrances and serving wild hogs.

Boar door whore sore lore

Colorful and mild, but somewhat superficial greeting.

Yellow mallow shallow hello

A beast of burden belonging to an ape who spends a lot of time in a disreputable place of drinking and cheap entertainment.

Honky tonky monkey donkey

Video recording of sexual violence perpetrated by primates on a pointed peninsula abounding in vineyards which was damaged by rough curtains.

Grape Cape ape rape drape scrape tape

A winter glove decimate by England and wounded by a feline infant.

Britain smitten kitten bitten Triton mitten

Black magic and malice spread by daring insect stuntmen.

Evil Knievel weavil evil

Ominous insect who loves apple juice and flies airplanes without engines.

Glider rider cider spider

A sexually aroused man with an irritated phrenic nerve who successfully approaches a woman with large bosoms.

Hiccough prick-up C-cup pick-up

A man who likes to walk in extremely cold regions and uses in competitive games extracted teeth instead of balls.

Polar stroller molar bowler

Orbiting plant carrying the name of the divine mother and run by ethereal being suffering from hormonal dysfunction.

Hairy fairy airy Mary dairy

A billet that quarantees participation in a strike boycott of musically gifted insects that takes place in an uncultivated young forest with burnable croquet gates.

Briquet wicket thicket cricket piquet ticket

Story about money posted on behalf of a semialbino cetacean held in a prison serving beer that has seen better days and located in a valley often temporarily covered with little pieces of ice.

Pale tail whale hail dale pale ale jail mail bail tale

A deceptive telegram describing an aristocratic musician who bought the flames produced by burning old automobile parts.

Lyre Sire tire pyre fire buyer liar wire

An acculturated African prairie animal born in late September or early October with highly developed breasts.

D-bra Libra zebra

Population explosion among medically trained but sexually inexperienced fish with uneasiness about caviar.

Sturgeon virgin surgeon burgeon

An avian fetishist who is sexually attracted to blankets and is capable to have intercourse with them while floating in the air.

Cover hover lover plover

Light produced by flintstones of ravenous fish who in the role of nude federal agents wait in poorly lit public gardens and check high flying birds for signs of drug abuse.

Dark park lark mark stark shark narc hark spark.

A Tibetan ritual play about the mother of a Hindu god and Andean beasts of burden consecrated to the Hindu god of love.

Rama mama Kama llama lama drama.

A spaceship carrying a high-pitch musical instrument made of cartilage and hard to chew and an angry plant capable of inflicting sharp pain.

Gristle whistle bristle thistle missile.

A man who tears parts of clothes that others gently open, gives advice to American politicians, and gulps drinks on board of an American airline carrier.

Zipper ripper gipper tipper clipper sipper.

The better of two restaurants staffed by young theosophists which are part of a large steamship owned by hard working employees of heavy industry.

Steiner minor miner liner finer diner

Murderous activity using heated surgical equipment and aimed against young female population suffering from nervous tension.

Tauter daughter cauter slaughter

A discussion among the molecules of dough on the dish of a somewhat more obese character from Alice in Wonderland on the subject of dispersion of subatomic particles.

Fatter hatter platter batter matter scatter chatter

Hearsay about the chatter that went on during a fight between bulls and cows made of intertwined branches who were using aboriginal musical instruments as weapons.

Wattle cattle rattle battle prattle tattle

Escape of a group of well-positioned and highly influential dirty domestic animals clad in an early Biblical way from a hogan-type jail through an underground passage.

Big wig fig rig pig twig brig dig gig

Observation of a difficult aerial combat involving pilots who cause tree epidemics.

Blight flight tight fight sight

A person who shows contempt for a proposal suggesting that he bid for a treasury.

Coffer offer proffer scoffer

A neat fish dancer specializing in packaging of toilet bowls.

Dapper tapper crapper wrapper snapper

A large insect towering over farmers harvesting the field and destroying metal associated with the planet Venus.

Copper chopper cropper topper whopper hopper

A small talkative rodent who is a devout botanist and healer.

Verbal herbal gerbil

Stretchable tool used for drawing patterns.

Tensile pencil stencil

Garden equipment that has special knowledge concerning Hebrew physiognomy.

Moses noses gnosis hoses

An old cow with a malodorous abdomen made of an agar-like substance.

Smelly belly jelly nellie

An action meeting that takes place between two mountains and has on its agenda the different ways to count outbursts of flirting behavior.

Dally sally tally valley rally

Sound emitted by a cloth used for drying the intestines that belongs to a garden tool with a very thin handle living near a lake on the Colorado River.

Powell dowel trowel bowel towel vowel

An articulate village native who speaks to the point.

Focal vocal yokel local

A nuptial gauntlet staged in a strength-giving tall structure by recoiling and polite plants with an acidic taste who use ground wheat donated by the bride in lieu of rice.

Cower bower sour flower power tower dower flour shower

A diapositive showing a group of unilaterally sunburnt lions and an obese newly-wed lady who is trying to conceal that she was swept by a wave.

Side fried pride tide glide ride hide wide bride slide

A Japanese theater play about urinary habits written by a Greek philosopher who loves paradoxes, lives in an American gambling city, and engages in games that involve numbers.

Reno keno Zeno pee-No

A supplier who pampers luggage containers, deters those who ridicule others, and likes to tap on chairs of old folks.

Cocker locker mocker shocker rocker knocker stocker

A Japanese electronic gadget that belongs to an emaciated midget horse with counterfeit associates.

Phony crony bony pony Sony

Booing sound of body parts vital for locomotion who are stained by ashes from burnt tree stumps and robbed of vital protection.

Root soot foot boot loot hoot

Eagerness to quiet the atmosphere after a collision of luxurious painting utensils and aquatic disposal of ashamed melting snow.

Lush brush crush blush slush flush hush rush

Speculations suggesting that a tournament would be neater if it involved sharp tasting greens carrying the name of a famous Gerschwin character.

Bess cress chess less mess guess

A dairy product who after discovery that his rain pipes got completely clogged started to mumble, stammer, and shake the window shades.

Utter gutter clutter mutter stutter shutter flutter butter

Noise emitted by a mechanical dog discovered lying near a circular pile.

Round mound ground found wound hound sound

Phobia of cut up baguettes and of the ghost of a certain heavy metal.

Shred bread dead lead dread

A Nordic looking man who would rather brood about the miracles of the beyond.

Yonder wonder ponder fonder blonder

A birth-related bird who owns a silver utensil used by a famous extraterrestrial for eating fat meat and is known for opening bottles filled in Manhattan by a special twist.

Mork pork fork York cork torque stork

Confidence in the movement that demands rightful imprisonment of elephants who during the period of their sexual activity develop a firm layer of pulverized decayed metal on their skin.

Must lust rust dust crust just bust thrust trust

A scale measuring the intensity of aggression in actors playing wise men facing substantial reduction of their salary.

Sage wage stage rage gauge

A fruity tasting and screaming German philosopher covered with aquatic parasites.

Peachy screechy leechy Nietzsche

Source of water of the hill owned by a nobleman.

Count mount fount

An American writer who commends seamen, holds in prison hunters of cetaceans, and supports the freedom of producers of clothes.

Sailor hailer whaler jailor taylor bailor Mailer

A basket used in VW buses for storing moister diapers.

Damper pamper camper hamper

A duplicate organism produced by genetic engineering by an isolated work-avoiding bee.

Lone drone grown clone

An infant canine who owns a young upward-moving aquarium fish professional.

Yupie guppy puppy

A competition-winning psychological instrument that can measure the degree to which mountain top parasites enjoy life at the time of leisure.

Best crest pest zest rest test

Sexual conquest that occurred during an imitation beef barbeque party held near a body of water named after a famous British historical figure.

Drake Lake fake steak bake make

Monstrous terminal part of the gastrointestinal system of a Roman god with one head and two faces.

Heinous Janus anus

A high card picturing a swelling caused by anal intercourse that took place on the remnants of a tree trunk.

Stump hump rump bump trump

A posthumous executive body of aristocrats who lost interest in river crossing and were killed by rapiers.

Ford-bored sword-gored lord board

A gruesome little European fish who specializes in tales about the illustrious past of a British political party.

Gory dory Tory glory story

Try to describe the images that the following HPs evoke:

Sorry quarry lorry worry

Geopard peppered leopard

Great state strait gate bait crate freight fate hate

Parrot carrot claret

Lime time dime rhyme thyme mime crime

Mean teen dean seen lean green bean

Tough rough buff stuff guff

Metal kettle nettle settle

Weird tiered feered reared steered geared beard

Sloth cloth moth broth Thoth

Dapper crapper wrapper tapper

Decco gekko Greco echo

Balto alto Rialto salto

Mango tango

Hocus pocus crocus locus

Horus Taurus saurus

Gray day May hay stray way Bay lay tray

Focused locust

Laser phaser blazor razor geyser

Jagger dagger bagger tagger

Monad gonad

Lenin Benin renin

Kremlin gremlin

Maggot faggot

Fertile turtle myrtle

Sicker wicker picker sticker liquor