

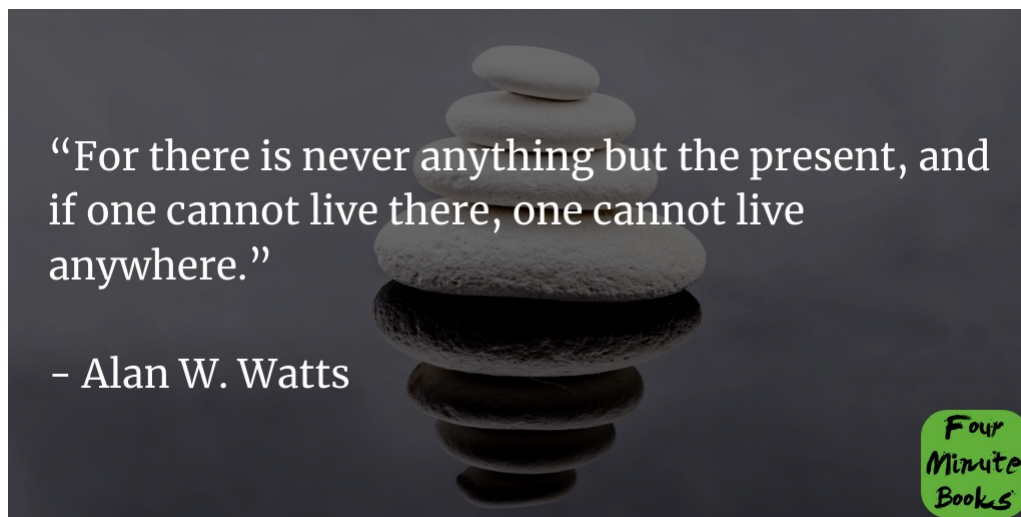
The Way Of Zen Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Way Of Zen* is the ultimate guide to understanding the history, principles, and benefits of Zen and how it can help us experience mental stillness and enjoy life even in uncertain times.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



At one time or another in your past, you've probably used the word Zen. It may have been while referring to a particularly peaceful feeling room you were in. Or possibly you heard a coworker explaining how they were going to relax over the weekend to get her Zen back.

For Western nations, hearing the word Zen makes us think of meditation and tranquility. But are we right in thinking of it like this?

The actual ways of this philosophy are much more abstract and difficult for Westerners to understand. But if you happen to live in the west and would like to comprehend it's tenets, you're in luck because that's exactly what Alan Watts teaches in his book *The Way of Zen*.

Here are the 3 biggest lessons I've learned from this book:

1. Our minds create illusions about reality, but Zen helps us see things accurately.
2. You need to practice naturalness and spontaneity if you want to learn the art of Zen.
3. Observe the world just as it is to become good at meditation.

Sit down, relax, and let's discover the ways of this ancient philosophy!

Lesson 1: Zen allows you to see clearly the illusions that your mind creates.

You want to be happy, of course, and it's likely your ultimate goal in life. But have you ever thought about what you would do if you ever got it?

For subscribers to the Zen way, pursuing happiness is foolish. That's because it comes from the false idea that we can have only the good in life without any of the bad.

Think of it this way. Do you remember the last time you felt uncomfortable while laying in bed on your side? You likely switched to the other side, right? At first, you feel better, but eventually, you're in the same exact place as you were before.

This is where the paradox comes in. You can only feel the comfort of switching sides because you knew the discomfort of being on one side for too long. **In other words, pain isn't avoidable and it's also just another aspect of pleasure.**

Zen also teaches that you can't be a victim of circumstances but that you are part of them. In the case of a hot summer day, you don't sweat from the heat, the sweat is the heat.

Another way to understand it is to look at the connection between your mind and body. You don't get into certain circumstances, they only exist because your mind and body are there to observe them.

Lesson 2: The art of Zen requires naturalness and spontaneity.

According to this ancient philosophy, we needn't try to become anything specific. In other words, it's all about letting yourself be aimless. Doing nothing is encouraged, for example.

For those of us in the west, this sounds like a waste of time. But if you look at the natural world, it's the normal state for almost everything. Your cat doesn't attempt to become anything except a cat, for instance. Zen teaches us to think similarly, that we should let our thoughts go to move naturally, however they want.

It's important to see emotions in this way too. **Whatever you're feeling after an event is natural, and thus valuable.**

One Zen monk began to cry after learning about the death of a close relative. This prompted his student to suggest that it wasn't right for someone of his status to act like that. The monk's response that he was weeping because he wanted to can teach us a lot about the importance of letting ourselves feel whatever we do.

To Zen believers, anything we do and anything that happens is right in a way because it is instinctive.

The words we say are another important part of life we must apply this way of thinking to. One Zen master, in response to someone asking what the ultimate secret of Buddhism was, spontaneously said “dumpling.”

While this might confuse Westerners or any ordinary person, this man’s answer unearthed deep truths about the ways of Buddhism with a single word. Without a respect for natural thinking, this would never have happened.

Lesson 3: If you want to become good at meditation, observe the world just as it is.

Maybe you’ve recently tried meditation. What would you say your goal is when you sit down to do it? Maybe you want to understand something difficult, get some peace, or clear your head. To Zen believers, setting any goal when meditating is a bad idea.

Buddhism and Taoism teach the opposite and use meditation as a means to empty the mind and purify it. In the philosophy of Zen, however, the mind is pure already because it’s natural. Attempting to do anything beyond that is just mudding it up with whatever you want.

For those who subscribe to Zen, it’s vital to just sit and view the world to truly interact with it. If you think about how the world is still there whether or not you’re thinking or acting within it, this makes sense.

Another way of understanding this is to consider your mind as if it were a muddy river. Throughout each day and each experience, your mental state becomes clouded, just like a river with churning water. If muddy water is left to sit in peace, however, the dirt sinks down and the water becomes clear.

In other words, every time you meditate you’re letting your mind be still to give it a chance to let all of the “sediment” sink to the bottom so you can have clarity.

Rather than focusing on the breath or anything else, Zen meditation is more about just becoming aware of what’s going on at the moment.

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The Way Of Zen Review

I liked the latter, more actionable parts of *The Way Of Zen* better than the first, more historical portion. However, the whole book was as enlightening as the topic itself! This is one that I think all Westerners should read to begin challenging, and also improving, their view on the world.

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Who would I recommend The Way Of Zen summary to?

The 54-year-old who thinks that he has a good understanding of what Zen means but doesn't actually know anything about its history, the 25-year-old who would like to have more peace, and anyone that's curious to know about the benefits of Eastern philosophy.