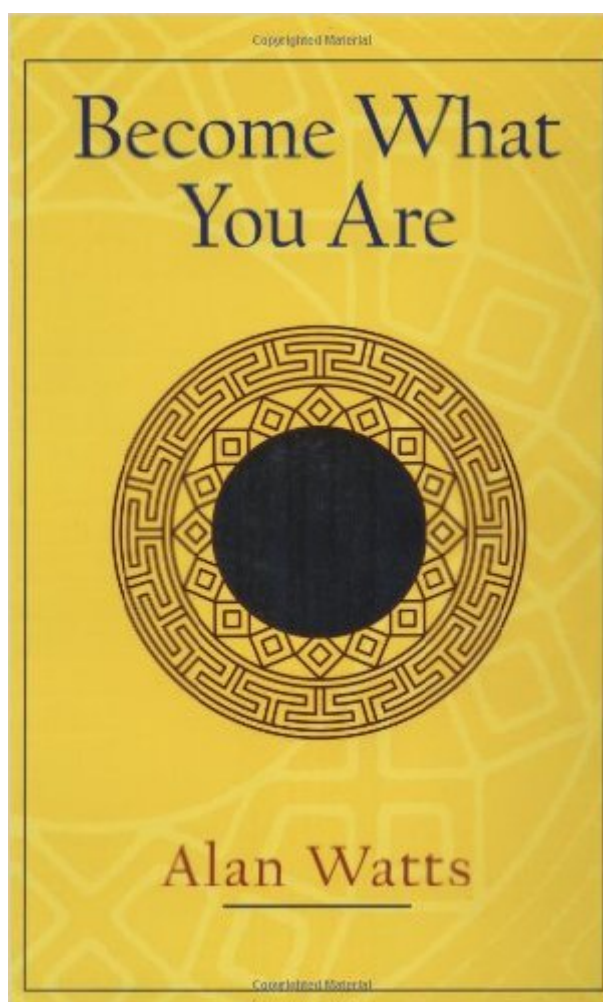


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Become What You Are



Synopsis

"Life exists only at this very moment, and in this moment it is infinite and eternal. For the present moment is infinitely small; before we can measure it, it has gone, and yet it exists forever. . . . You may believe yourself out of harmony with life and its eternal Now; but you cannot be, for you are life and exist Now." —from *Become What You Are*

In this collection of writings, including nine new chapters never before available in book form, Watts displays the intelligence, playfulness of thought, and simplicity of language that has made him so perennially popular as an interpreter of Eastern thought for Westerners. He draws on a variety of religious traditions, and covers topics such as the challenge of seeing one's life "just as it is," the Taoist approach to harmonious living, the limits of language in the face of ineffable spiritual truth, and the psychological symbolism of Christian thought.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For such a small book there is an incredible quantity of wisdom here to contemplate. The essays included in this collection are all from Watt's work in the 50's. It becomes clear that this man was not merely ahead of his time- he was beyond time.

The Paradox of Self-Denial: This first essay sets the tone for the collection. It is framed around the intuition that "He who loseth his soul shall find it." It is pointed out that the seeker that consciously tries to transcend the world, and his own conscious ego, shall never do so. It is only when ego has truly, deeply, experienced defeat, failure, and despair that true transcendence is ever reached. And perhaps not even then, for it comes from beyond the self and is far from predictable.

Become What You Are: This essay deals with the concept of the

enlightened man as a mirror. This involves grasping nothing/ refusing nothing and receiving all/ keeping nothing. This is detachment from future and past to live in an eternal Now. We are all centered in the infinite Tao- we have all but to recognize it. The Finger and the Moon: One of his most famous essays, it deals with not mistaking religion for the ultimate goal of religion. Once you cross the river, don't try to carry the raft with you on your back. Importance: Deals with the fact that the importance of things has nothing to do with their permanence or duration. Value is in quality and not quantity. The tiniest part of the universe contains that universe in microcosm- and fully participates in the whole. Tao and Wu-Wei: Watts addressed the concept of Wu-Wei long before it became fashionable. This is what works and moves in harmony with nature without having to be forced. Your heart does this- so would your mind if you let it. You just have to get out of your own way. A life, or a society, totally balled-up in rigid self-control and self-consciousness must eventually fail. Wu-Wei means to live with your center outside of this trap. Lightness of Touch: Deals with not taking the world of Maya, or yourself, too seriously. The real world is the play of the spirit. Birds in the Sky: Describes the path of the sage as paradoxically both in harmony with the world, as well as detached from it (in the world but not of it.) Points out that almost all western thought rebels against this as pessimism and nihilism. Walking on the Wheel: Examines the ideal life as 1) stillness, calm, and immovability, and as 2) dancing with the flow of life. Resolves the seeming conflict as a question of relative perception. The Language of Metaphysical Experience: Examines how modern logical philosophy (scientific empiricism and logical positivism) simply ignores metaphysical and spiritual issues as "meaningless." Points out that such philosophers have no idea what reality is. Shows how materialists are ego driven types who are driven to order and control- and ignore anything that doesn't fit. Good Intentions: Shows how good intentions in and of themselves are not necessarily good- if they are based on ignorance, laziness, incompetence, or misplaced desire. Birth of the Divine Son: Once again, long before it was popular Watts recognized that the symbolism of the Christ long preceded Christianity. The Universal power of the symbol of Spirit entering into union with matter is examined. Also dealt with is the concept of the Second Birth- of the potential for unregenerate man becoming Christ. Even the cover of this book is a spiritual lesson, with its mirror at the center of the mandala, that we may glimpse our Self at the center of creation.

This is a collection of essays written by Watts before he came to the United States in 1938 along with articles he wrote during the 50's. The overall theme is about discovering, or realizing, who we are. No one explains our true natures better than Watts. I have been a big fan of his ever since my days growing up in the 60's in Northern California. I listened to his radio program out of Berkeley a

few times and even met him once. Though I really didn't know what the heck he was talking about it was clear to me that he was very wise and sincere. I was more into girls than Reality at the time. I digress. Sorry ladies, I am not blaming any of you for my wasted youth. I just wish I had used a little more of my youthful energy a little more wisely. Classically educated in Occidental Orthodoxy Mr. Watts went in search of further understanding and found it in the Wisdom of the East. He found no fundamental argument between Jesus and Buddha. Between Christianity and Buddhism perhaps, but not between the two great men. The transformation of consciousness was both men's primary focus, not dogma. They were both big on meditation. Their message was essentially the same. As the Buddha stated in the Dhammapada, "The path is not somewhere in the sky, It is in our hearts". As Jesus stated in Luke 17:20-21, "The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." As the Buddha and Jesus well knew, to experience ultimate reality--reality as it is as opposed to merely what one thinks it is can make one feel like a child again, everything becomes new, born again. Enlightened. Such a mystical experience can also make one feel as though everyday reality is little more than a dream, like one has woke up from a dream of being separate from the rest of reality. The Father and I are a unitive one. Nothing is separate from the whole. Reality is whole and it has no second. More than one, but less than two, synergetic. Watts had found that Oriental religious philosophy, in particular Taoism, more freely shared this mystical interconnectedness of man and God (Source) with the common man than do most Western religious traditions. Alan then made it his life's mission to spread the good news. That we are part and parcel of a singularly unitive totality. That we are essential. That our predominant Western conception of a discrete self is a case of mistaken identity. That we "think" we are separate from the rest of reality. Thus cut off from our source through dualistic thinking we face an alien world alone. Witness the universality in the West of existential dread. The truth shall set you free. We are not alone, nor are we strangers in a strange land. "In my Father's house are many rooms". John 14:2. This is more than semantics. We are not alone because every whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Reality is synergetic. Not simply one. But a unitive One. A One greater than one. We are home for we come out of the world and not into it. No man is an island, he is a peninsula. It is an intuitive thing. More a feel than a think. Though we cannot know God, I AM THAT I AM, we can experience God. "Be still, and know that I am God". Psalm 46:10. Meditate. Read this collection of essays and start seeing what Watts saw. That we are created in the image of God (or whatever word or term you prefer that refers to that which is beyond naming). The eternal Tao, Allah, Source, Great Spirit in the Sky, or my personal favorite, the ineffable "I AM THAT I AM". That whatever we prefer to call It we are a microcosm of

the macrocosm. We are a part of that which has no separate parts. That it takes a godlike being to realize a Godlike source. That the Kingdom of I AM THAT I AM is a family and we are all members. I also wholeheartedly recommend Mr. Watt's last book "Tao: The Watercourse Way". It is about living a balanced life, a natural/supernatural way of living. I found the Chapter on the Chinese Language to be one of the most enlightening essays I have ever read. Read it and you will know why a picture can indeed be worth a thousand words. Alan had a way with words. That is, he used words at least as much as they used him.

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