GENERAL

alan watts does it matter

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Alan Watts: Does It Matter? Exploring the Question That Shapes a Life

When people ask, *"Does it matter?"* they are often seeking clarity in a world that feels chaotic, uncertain, and full of choices. Alan Watts, the British philosopher, mystic, and popularizer of Eastern thought in the West, tackled this question with a blend of humor, insight, and profound empathy. His perspective invites us to examine the underlying assumptions that drive our actions and to discover a richer, more authentic way of living. In this article, we will unpack **Alan Watts does it matter**, exploring how his ideas can help you answer the question for yourself, transform your relationships, and find meaning in everyday moments.

Alan Watts: A Brief Biography

Born in 1915 in Chislehurst, England, Alan Watts was raised in a family that valued intellectual curiosity. After studying theology at the University of London, he became a priest in the Church of England. However, his spiritual journey led him beyond the confines of organized religion, and he eventually moved to the United States in 1956. There, he became a prolific lecturer, author, and radio personality, bringing Zen, Taoism, and Hindu philosophy to a generation of seekers. Watts wrote 25 books, including the classics *The Way of Zen* and *The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, and his talks—recorded and widely shared—continue to inspire listeners worldwide. His voice, often described as calm and conversational, made complex ideas accessible and engaging.

The Concept of "Does It Matter?" in Western Thought

The question "does it matter?" is at the heart of existential philosophy. From Socrates' inquiry into the good life to Kierkegaard's angst and Camus' absurdism, Western thinkers have wrestled with the significance of our choices. The phrase often reflects a search for purpose, a desire to distinguish the meaningful from the trivial, and a need to justify our actions in a seemingly indifferent universe. In this context, **Alan Watts does it matter** becomes a gateway to a different way of thinking—one that reframes the question itself.

Alan Watts on the Question: Does It Matter?

The Illusion of Separation

Watts famously challenged the idea that the self is separate from the rest of the world. He argued that our perception of isolation is a mental construct, a "mask" that limits our experience. When we ask, *"Does it matter?"*, we often do so from a position of perceived separation. Watts suggested that if we recognize our interconnectedness, the question becomes less about individual significance and more about the flow of life itself. In his own words, "You are an aperture through which the universe is looking at itself." This perspective dissolves the notion that individual actions can be judged in isolation.

The Paradox of Meaning

Instead of offering a definitive answer, Watts proposed that the search for meaning is a paradox. He noted that the very act of seeking meaning can be a form of meaning-making. When we ask, *"Does it matter?"*, we are engaging in a dialogue that shapes our experience. Watts encouraged listeners to embrace the mystery rather than clinging to certainty. His approach invites us to live fully in the present, to accept that meaning is not a fixed destination but

a continuous, evolving process.

Practical Applications of Alan Watts' Perspective

In Relationships

- Listening with Presence: By acknowledging our shared humanity, we can listen more deeply, allowing conversations to unfold organically.
- Letting Go of Judgment: Watts taught that judgment creates barriers. When we release the need to label actions as right or wrong, we open space for empathy.
- Embracing Impermanence: Accepting that relationships change reduces the fear of loss and encourages living in the moment.

In Work and Productivity

- Redefining Success: Rather than measuring success by external metrics, Watts suggested focusing on flow and contribution.
- Mindful Workflow: Practicing mindfulness at work can transform routine tasks into opportunities for presence.
- Balancing Purpose and Pleasure: Aligning work with personal values ensures that the question "does it matter?" yields a positive answer.

In Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Acceptance of Emotions: Watts encouraged embracing feelings without attachment, reducing self-judgment.
- Reframing Thoughts: By viewing thoughts as passing phenomena, we can reduce anxiety and cultivate inner peace.
- Cultivating Gratitude: Recognizing the interconnectedness of life fosters gratitude for even the smallest moments.

Common Misunderstandings and Clarifications

Misinterpreting Watts' Use of "Does It Matter?"

Many listeners assume that Watts was advocating nihilism, the belief that nothing matters. In reality, his philosophy is rooted in acceptance and the recognition of impermanence. He did not deny value; he suggested that value is dynamic and context-dependent.

Distinguishing Between Existential Nihilism and Acceptance

Existential nihilism posits that life has no inherent meaning, whereas Watts' acceptance acknowledges that meaning is created through our interactions. By embracing this creative process, we can find purpose without imposing rigid structures.

How to Incorporate the Idea Into Daily Life

Mindfulness Practices

1. Set aside five minutes each morning for breath awareness.
2. Observe sensations in your body without labeling them.
3. Notice the flow of thoughts as if they were clouds passing in the sky.

Questioning Assumptions

When faced with a dilemma, pause and ask: *What am I assuming? How does this assumption shape my perception of the situation? Is there another way to look at it?*This practice helps uncover hidden biases and opens new pathways to decision-making.

Embracing Impermanence

Practice letting go of attachments—whether to outcomes, people, or material possessions. Remind yourself that change is a natural part of life, and that each moment offers a fresh chance to act with intention.

Alan Watts Quotes on Meaning and Existential Questions

- "The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance." – Encourages active engagement with life's fluidity.
- "You are an aperture through which the universe is looking at itself." – Highlights interconnectedness.
- "We are all just walking each other home." – Suggests a shared journey.
- "To be free from the mind is to be free from all suffering." – Emphasizes liberation through awareness.
- "The meaning of life is not something we discover but something we create." – Reinforces the creative aspect of meaning.

Conclusion

When we ask, *"Alan Watts does it matter?"*, we are invited to look beyond the surface of the question and to explore the deeper currents that shape our experience. Watts' teachings remind us that meaning is not a static destination but a dynamic dance between self and world. By recognizing our interconnectedness, embracing impermanence, and practicing presence, we transform the question from a source of anxiety into an opportunity for growth. In the end, the answer is less about the external validation of our actions and more about the richness we bring to the present moment. Let the wisdom of Alan Watts guide you to live fully, love deeply, and, most importantly, to ask the question with curiosity rather than fear.

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