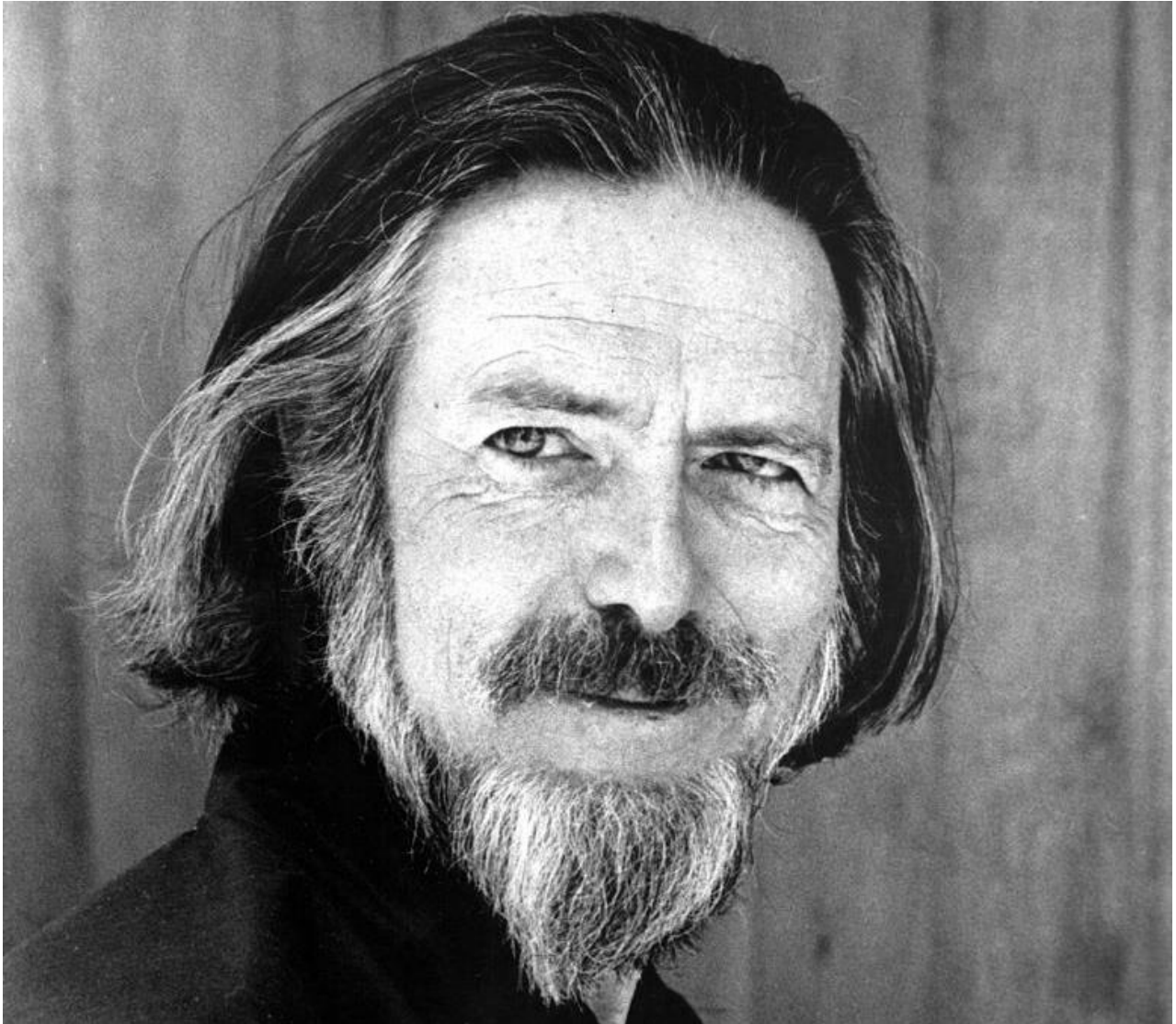


Alan Watts

By Alanwatts.org



Who is Alan Watts?

A prolific author and speaker, Alan Watts was one of the first to interpret Eastern wisdom for a Western audience. Born outside London in 1915, he discovered the nearby Buddhist Lodge at a young age. After moving to the United States in 1938, Alan became an Episcopal priest for a time, and then relocated to Millbrook, New York, where he wrote his pivotal book *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety*. In 1951 he moved to San Francisco where he began teaching Buddhist studies, and in 1956 began his popular radio show, "Way Beyond the West." By the early sixties, Alan's radio talks aired nationally and the counterculture movement adopted him as a spiritual spokesperson. He wrote and traveled regularly until his passing in 1973.

The Early Years

Alan Wilson Watts was born on January 6, 1915 in the countryside near London, England. From a young age Alan was fascinated by Asian art, literature, and philosophy (his mother's students were children of missionaries to Asia). His parents recognized his bright and inquiring nature, and encouraged Alan to write. His father, a businessman, would bring Alan to the Buddhist Lodge in London, where as a teenager, Alan became editor for the Lodge's journal, *The Middle Way*. In 1932, he produced his first booklet, *An Outline of Zen Buddhism*, a summary based on the Zen writings of D. T. Suzuki. In 1938, Alan moved to the United States to study Zen in New York, where he soon began lecturing in bookstores and cafes.

The Middle Years

In 1940, Alan published *The Meaning of Happiness*, a book based on his talks. Ironically, the book was issued on the eve of the second World War. After a brief time in New York, Alan moved to Chicago and enrolled at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, deepening his interest in mystical theology. Alan was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1944, but by the spring of 1950, Alan's time as a priest had run its course, and he left the Church and Chicago for upstate New York. There he settled into a small farmhouse outside Millbrook and began writing *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety*.

In early 1951 Alan relocated to San Francisco, where, at Dr. Frederic Spiegelberg's invitation, he began teaching Buddhism at the American Academy of Asian Studies (which later became the California Institute of Integral Studies). Drawing quite a crowd, his classes at the Academy soon blossomed into evening lectures open to the public and spilled over to local coffee houses frequented by Beat poets and writers.

The Later Years

By the late-sixties Alan was living on a ferryboat in Sausalito in a waterfront community of bohemians, artists, and other cultural renegades. Alan's ferryboat soon became such a popular destination that to maintain his focus on writing, he moved into a cabin on the nearby slopes of Mount Tamalpais. There he became part of the Druid Heights artist community in the late sixties. Continuing to travel on lecture tours into the early seventies, Alan was increasingly drawn to life on the mountain, where he wrote his mountain journals (later published as *Cloud Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown*), penned his monograph *The Art of Contemplation*, worked on his autobiography *In My Own Way*, and wrote his final book, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*. However, soon after returning from a whirlwind lecture tour that took him through the U.S., Canada, and Europe, Alan passed away in his sleep on November 16, 1973, on the mountain he loved.