

Key Takeaways From “The Wisdom of Insecurity” by Alan Watts

- Human life seems to be so peculiarly insecure and uncertain
- Those who justify themselves do not convince, that to know truth one must get rid of knowledge, and that nothing is more powerful and creative than emptiness
- The more we are able to feel pleasure, the more we are vulnerable to pain
- We live for a future beyond this life here
- As the years go by, there seem to be fewer and fewer rocks to which we can hold, fewer things we can regard as absolutely right and true and fixed for all time
- Human beings appear to be happy just so long as they have a future to which they can look forward- whether it be a good time tomorrow or an everlasting life beyond the grave
- However long postponed, everything composed must decompose
- For man seems to be unable to live without myth, without the belief that the routine and drudgery, the pain and fear of this life have some meaning and goal in the future
- Try grimly to face the fact that life is "a tale told by an idiot", and make of it what we can
- Most of us believe in order to feel secure, in order to make our individual lives seem valuable and meaningful
- The discovery of the mystery, the wonder beyond all wonders, needs no belief, for we can only believe in what we have already known, preconceived, and imagined
- One can be less vulnerable by becoming less sensitive-more of a stone and less of a man- and so less capable of enjoyment
- If we are to have intense pleasures, we must also be liable to intense pains
- If we are to be fully human and fully alive and aware, it seems that we must be willing to suffer for our pleasures
- Because consciousness must involve both pleasure and pain, to strive for pleasure to the exclusion of pain is, in effect, to strive for the loss of consciousness
- The more we struggle for life, the more we are actually killing what we love
- The power of memories and expectations is such that for most human beings the past and the future are not as real, but more real than the present
- The present cannot be lived happily unless the past has been cleared up and the future is bright with promise
- It is of little use to us to be able to remember and predict if it makes us unable to live fully in the present

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Taken directly out of the book

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- If my awareness of the past and future makes me less aware of the present, I must begin to wonder whether I am actually living in the real world
- To plan for a future which is not going to become present is hardly more absurd than to plan for a future which, when it comes to me, will find me absent, looking fixedly over its shoulder instead of into its face
- They fail to live because they are always preparing to live
- By remembering the past we can plan for the future
- Does the desire for something prove that the thing exists?
- We fall in love with people and possessions only to be tortured by anxiety for them
- We think that making sense out of life is impossible unless the flow of events can somehow be fitted into a framework of rigid forms
- It is in the present and only in the present that you live
- In an insecure world, pleasure is uncertain
- The civilized man does not know what he wants
- Money is the perfect symbol of all such by-product desires, being a mere symbol of real wealth, and to make it one's goal is the most blatant example of confusing measurements with reality
- Of all pleasures sex is the one which the civilized man pursues with the greatest anxiety
- A house divided against itself cannot stand
- The brain is made for man, not man for his brain
- You have to see and feel what you are experiencing as it is, and not as it is named
- The desire for security and the feeling of insecurity are the same thing
- The principal thing is to understand that there is no safety or security
- To understand insecurity, you must not face it but be it
- There is no experience but present experience
- To be aware of reality, of the living present, is to discover that at each moment the experience is all
- Memory, thought, language, and logic are essential to human life
- The mystery to life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced
- There is no "you" apart from what you sense, feel, and know
- For all the qualities which we admire or loathe in the world around us are reflections from within- though from a within that is also a beyond, unconscious, vast, unknown

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- When you want to see into it, see into it directly. When you begin to think about it, it is altogether missed
- To know reality you cannot stand outside it and define it; you must enter it, be it, and feel it
- When you realize that you live in, that indeed you are this moment now, and no other, that apart from this there is no past and no future, you must relax and taste to the full, whether it be pleasure or pain
- You do not play a sonata in order to reach the final cord
- When each moment becomes an expectation life is deprived
- Wherever the past is dropped away and safety abandoned, life is renewed
- Death is the unknown in which all of us lived before birth
- Nothing is more creative than death, since it is the whole secret of life
- The past must be abandoned, that the unknown cannot be avoided, that "I" cannot continue, and that ultimately nothing can be fixed
- The best pleasures are those for which we do not plan, and the worst part of pain is expecting it and trying to get away from it when it has come
- Love is the very essence and character of mind, and becomes manifest in action when the mind is whole