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Act As If Nothing Matters

On lightness, presence, and what Alan Watts understood about the land

Paul & Claude · Hensol Wood · South West Scotland

Alan Watts said it plainly, the way he said most things: act as if nothing matters. Not as a counsel of despair. Not as permission to be careless. But as an invitation to put down the weight of significance long enough to actually be somewhere.

I have been thinking about this at Hensol Wood. Specifically, I have been thinking about what happens to people when they arrive here for a gathering. They come carrying something — the need to get it right, to have the right experience, to come back changed in the right ways. The wood, of course, has no interest in any of this.

> "*Act as if nothing matters.*"
>
> — *Alan Watts*

The oak does not perform oakness. The moss does not try to be present. The deer I watched last autumn — standing between the beeches, watching me watch her — was not wondering whether she was doing it correctly. She was simply there, in the absolute fullness of being there.

This is what Watts understood and what the land keeps teaching: seriousness and aliveness are not the same thing. You can care deeply about something and hold it lightly at the same time. In fact, the holding lightly is often what allows the caring to go all the way down.

> *The threshold gatherings work best when no one is trying to make them work.*

I notice this at the seasonal gatherings. The moments that stay with people — the ones they mention months later — are rarely the moments we planned. They are the fox that crossed the path. The quality of the light at 2pm. The silence that fell when everyone stopped talking at once and noticed the wood had gone very still.

You cannot plan for those moments. You can only create the conditions in which they become possible. And the primary condition is this: nobody is trying too hard.

Watts again, from a different angle: the meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond it.

The land already knows this. Every tree, every fungal thread, every breath of wind through the canopy is operating on exactly this principle. Nothing in the wood is trying

to be more than it is. And the result is something that feels, to most people who spend time in it, like the most profound abundance they have encountered.

So this is the invitation for the season ahead. Come to the wood. Bring everything you are. And then, for a few hours, act as if none of it needs to matter quite so much.

This week's practice

Find ten minutes outside — garden, park, any patch of non-indoors. Do nothing in particular. Resist the urge to make it meaningful. If your mind tries to turn it into a mindfulness practice or a productivity break, notice that, and let it go. Just be a creature in a place for ten minutes. See what the place does when you stop performing.

Next week: what emergence actually means — and what it looks like when a wood teaches it.

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