

## **Wabi-Sabi**

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What wabi-sabi means... The culture and philosophy behind one of Japan's most influential concept, that curved its way through arts, ceremonies. Wabi-sabi became part of the everyday life of many in both Japan and overseas.

In Japan, there are many deep and meaningful concepts that are part of Japanese culture. The traditions and trends of the country are very interesting and circle around different forms of philosophy. Japanese culture and philosophy have a unique ideology of beauty and the perception of beauty and aesthetics in the world. One such intriguing Japanese concept is “wabi-sabi.”

### **The definition of wabi-sabi**

Wabi-sabi is the view or thought of finding beauty in every aspect of imperfection in nature. It is about the aesthetic of things in existence, that are “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete”.

Wabi-sabi is also deeply influenced by the teaching of the Buddha and its school of thought can be interlinked with Buddhist thinking. It is essentially a concept or ideology that comes from the ‘Buddhist teaching’ of the three marks of existence that are namely “impermanence” (mujō), suffering (ku) and emptiness or absence of self-nature (kū)”.

Wabi sabi is a beautiful way to describe what is natural and pure and to acknowledge the beauty of any substance or being in its most natural and raw form. It eliminates the rather Westernized concept of artificial beauty and idolizing a state of perfection that is seemingly unachievable and unnatural. The western world has made the concept of beauty into something that is becoming more and more refined as well as more and more unachievable with each passing day and it distorts the idea of natural beauty and accepting the flaws of existence, however, on the contrary, the Japanese belief and concept of wabi-sabi embraces just that and allows the people to be more accepting and open to embracing the beauty of flaws and rawness.

### **Wabi-sabi in Japanese culture and arts**

Wabi-sabi has a deep enrooted effect and influence on the culture of Japan. The philosophy reflects in many local aspects such as Japanese gardens, architecture, and many other forms of art as well. It is quite a delightful thing to experience and is a great theory put into reality through art and décor. Wabi sabi is a philosophy that has been extracted from the simplest of ideas and an everyday common thought but it has been implemented in such a beautiful way. It also goes well

with the environment and the way of life that the people of Japan lead and live in. The philosophy reflects their temperament and lifestyle and also links to Zen Buddhism.

### **What the words behind wabi-sabi mean?**

The concept can be better understood if it is broken down to its roots of the word ‘wabi-sabi’ itself. This leads to an interesting explanation and puts together a lot of sense behind the main concept that the word represents. ‘Wabi’ expresses the part of simplicity, impermanence, flaws, and imperfection. On the contrary, ‘Sabi’ displays and expresses the effect that time has on a substance or any object. Together ‘wabi-sabi’ embraces the idea of aesthetic appreciation of aging, flaws, and the beauty of the effects of time and imperfections. The two separate parts when put together, complete each other. They express simplicity and the truest form of an object. Finally, it embraces finding comfort in purity and a life detached from materialistic obsessions of the world.

### **Understanding the difficulty behind the concept**

For many foreigners the concept of wabi-sabi initially becomes difficult to understand and to digest at times. However, when it is simplified and broken down it becomes more clear and easier to understand. The pure intention behind the concept is present in the daily lives and art of Japanese people. The philosophy is present in their culture, traditions, and trends. It is different from what the rest of the world views. For a foreigner it could be hard to digest in the beginning. Nevertheless, once you embrace it, wabi-sabi opens a doorway to an enticing belief. Therefore, wabi-sabi has the power to change mindsets. It can change the common perception of what beauty and aesthetics really are and what they can be.

### **Questions (to be answered in your journal):**

1. Think of a regular **practice** you do (a hobby, a sport, an art). How might you incorporate wabi-sabi?
2. How can understanding the concept of wabi-sabi help with your outlook on life and your relationship with others?