

Between 1845 and 1847, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) decided to spend two years in a small cabin - located in the woods in Concord, Massachusetts, near Walden Pond - to see what it would be like to withdraw from the constant demands and "busyness" of daily life.

An American philosopher, poet and environmental scientist, Thoreau thought a great deal about what it means to live in the world as a human being. He wrote about his ideas and his two-year experiment in his book, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods*.

As he writes in *Walden*:

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.* (Thoreau, *Walden*, Volume 1, page 143.)

In this clip, Professor Richard H. Baker - a Transcendentalist scholar - gives an overview of Thoreau and the lessons he tried to learn when living in his Walden-Pond cabin (which no longer exists, in its original form).

Studying *Walden* helps us to understand more about Thoreau's philosophy of life. As it happens, many of his ideas fit well within today's culture.

Let's examine some of those ideas with quotes from *Walden*:

*My greatest skill in life has been to want but little.*

*I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.*

*What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate.*

*We can never have enough of nature.*

*Every generation laughs at the old fashions, but follows religiously the new.*

*Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.*

*Say what you have to say, not what you ought. Any truth is better than make-believe.*

*Confucius said, "To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge."*

*It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true today may turn out to be falsehood tomorrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields.*

*If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.*

*Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then.*

*No man ever stood the lower in my estimation for having a patch in his clothes: yet I am sure that there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience.*

*The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poor-house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the alms-house as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace.*

*Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.*

*A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts. We should be blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us.*

*Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail.*

*It is desirable that a man live in all respects so simply and preparedly that if an enemy take the town... he can walk out the gate empty-handed and without anxiety.*

*Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things.*

*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.*

*I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.*

What do these Thoreau quotes tell us about:

- The man who went to the woods; and
- What he learned during his time there?

Thoreau revised *Walden* seven times before he published it on August 9, 1854.

Credits:

Clip from "Teaching Henry David Thoreau" from the American Literary Classics - The Transcendentalists series (from TMW Media). Online, courtesy TMWMedia's Channel at YouTube.

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