

NOTES FROM: *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau

SUMMARY: For some reason, I still remember that this was the 133rd book that I had ever read since I started counting. No idea why I remember that. Maybe it's because *Walden* was one of the first books to hit me so hard and fast that it shook me alive as I was reading it and forever after.

Published in 1854, it's the nonfiction account of the time when American transcendentalist author Henry David Thoreau built his own cabin in the woods at Walden Pond and lived there by himself for two years. It's about the calming, reorienting power of solitude, about the transformative power of great books, and it's about how to leave society once in a while so that you can be better prepared to return to it.

We often get caught up in our cares, concerns, and Twitter feeds, and all these demands on our attention tend to crowd out that inner voice we all need to listen to once in a while if we are ever to understand our own lives or what we want them to be about. I doubt there are too many people in North America today who would be able to live by themselves in the woods for two years, but I'm sure that most of them would be much better off for doing it.

There are some truly profound and memorable observations scattered throughout these pages, and like I said, this book just completely took me over when I first read it in 2015. You don't have to move to the woods like Thoreau did in order to become a real person and reconnect with your authentic voice, but it sure as hell helps.

MK: Working yourself to death deprives you of the chance to experience all that life has to offer. There has to be more to life than your job, than simply making money. Sure, we need to make money, just like we human beings have to make blood. But making blood isn't the point of being human.

"I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself."

"As if you can kill time without injuring eternity."

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

MK: Age and experience have no correlation with wisdom, and advice from older people often turns out to be wrong. Just because someone has lived a long time doesn't mean that they've learned anything.

"So little has been tried."

"All change is a miracle to contemplate, but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant."

"What other intelligences are contemplating the same stars as we are at the same time?"

“There is a miracle taking place every instant.”

"To stand at the meeting place of two eternities."

“Birds do not sing in caves, and doves do not cherish their innocence in cots.”

“The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.”

MK: Thoreau built his own house in the picturesque woods for less than most people at that time paid in rent annually.

"I brag for humanity, and not merely for myself."

“The real wonder of the pyramids is the number of men who degraded themselves enough to make them.”

"For my part, I would like to know who did not build them, who was above such trifling."

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.”

“Live free and uncommitted. It makes but little difference if you are committed to a farm or the county jail.”

“We awaken to a higher life than we fell asleep from.”

“We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us even in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.”

“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.”

MK: The news is just the same event repeated over and over. If you've heard it once, there is no need to hear of other instances. Only the names and faces change.

“God himself culminates in the present moment.”

“Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.”

“How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book.”

“Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.”

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

“The earth is a living being and constantly recreates itself.”

“On a pleasant spring morning, all men's sins are forgiven.”

“The universe is wider than our views of it.”

“Direct your view inwards, and you'll find a thousand regions in your mind yet undiscovered.”

"I left the woods for the same reasons that I went there. It seemed to me that there are many more lives to be lived and I could spare no more time for this one."

“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.”

“However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. 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 poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse 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.”

“Superfluous wealth can buy only superfluities.”

“There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.”

“When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality.”

“If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal - that is your success. All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality. Perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched.”

“Only that day dawns to which we are awake.”