

The true meaning of life as conveyed by 'walden'



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It is a common fear that people have about whether or not they are wasting their lives with the limited amount of time they were given on earth. In “Where I Lived and What I Lived For,” Henry David Thoreau explores what he thinks the true meaning of life is and how he carries out living to his fullest potential, not wasting any time. Thoreau wished to enjoy life at its essence, or experience what it was like to strip life down to the bare minimum in order to truly live. He would think people overcomplicate their way of life in contemporary America and get too caught up in petty things that don't have any real importance. By living simply with the intention of being one with nature and not getting caught up in material things, one would be able to achieve living life to the fullest and truly experience what it means to live. Thoreau deeply believed in living a simple life reduced to its bare bones in order to truly live to the fullest. He comments on how people almost flaunt their complicated way of life, with the necessity to build and build and build upon things to the point where we lose touch with life itself. He maintains sanity and control of his life by “[letting his] affairs be as two or three.” It is his top priority to keep his problems at a minimum, because this way, he keeps himself grounded and not lost away with extra details that aren't needed or benefit him. Thoreau experiences life when it is stripped down to the bare minimum in order to live deliberately.

One may wonder what, exactly, it means to live life at its essence. According to Thoreau, he wanted to “suck out all the marrow of life,” to get the “genuine meanness of it” or know how sublime it is “by experience.” He wanted to get in there and get his hands dirty, to take a dive off the deep end and fully take advantage of life. Simply put, he did not want to look back

and see that he did not truly live as there is a difference between living and just staying alive. He wanted to be an active participant in his life rather than just sitting back and going through the motions. Even if it was rough and crude and treated him badly, at least he can say he went out there and put himself on the line for the sake of truly understanding what it means to live. If it happened to be luxurious, he wanted to experience that for himself as well. Rather than being passive, he wished to live deep and grab life by the horns so as to live life to the fullest.

To Thoreau, people were very caught up in things that were not of any real importance which prevented them from being at peace with things that do matter, such as nature. He claims that "opinion, prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance," are just "slush." Being very outspoken about social justice, Thoreau thought that having all these sorts of discrimination against one another and being very obsessed with how we perceive each other is very minimal and does not matter in the long run. People become too into themselves and have prejudice about others which is all things that we need to cut through and see how pointless it all is. By this logic, Thoreau would think people overcomplicate things in contemporary America. With all the material things we have and how addicted we are to putting ourselves on social media with all the superficial filters and editing, fast comments about nothing that is of substance, it just reiterates how we build things on top of one another and lose contact with nature and even reality. With our tendency to always create, we will always feel like we need to innovate and keep building on petty things because if the past is taken into consideration, people would have never even considered the possibility

of a phone, much less the toxicity of social media and posting things for attention. These modern first world problems are problems that were unforeseeable, and if Thoreau hates the post-office for its lack of “memorable news,” he would absolutely despise technology. By adding material things on top of things, people get carried away and caught up in insignificant events that aren’t what life is really all about.

Thoreau looks down at how people are in a rush to live their life like they are always trying to catch up in a rushed attempt to never miss anything. There is a notion that time is always rushing and so people feel they should run along with it, but Thoreau claims that is a “waste of life” and that we have “the Saint Vitus’ dance and cannot possibly keep our heads still.” By comparing our compulsions to this nervous disorder he conveys how people are always itching to do something and can never just relax. People cannot simply stop and observe the world around them. He also brings into question what people are always so busy to see, such as when a man wakes up from a quick nap and immediately has to check the news like the world was waiting for him. He questions what we are so eager to check and what we even see when we do see what’s going on in the world. By always hurrying to the point where we don’t even know what we are hurrying for, we lose sight of what is important. When people live with such hurry, they are not actually taking anything in or taking a step back to evaluate how they live and what matters in life.

When people only know the reality they are in, they begin to assimilate to that and no longer dream beyond what they know. Thoreau quotes “soul.... from the circumstances in which it is placed, mistakes its own character.”

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Circumstances make a person believe that they are trapped in a bad situation, so they do not let their true self shine through. If an individual believes that they are one fixed thing and cannot evolve past that, then they will never have room to grow. Thoreau encourages people to look to children for that wisdom because their imagination knows no bounds. In their minds, they can become anything they want to be, and when adults say they are wiser because they have more experience, they have automatically failed because it just means that the imagination is gone and that fuel to grow beyond limits that their current situation has placed them in, has disappeared. By thinking with the mindset that growth is possible, one's true character is revealed and they live to their fullest potential.

Thoreau set out on a mission to get down to the nitty-gritty of life so that he will not look back at it as a failed experience. By not getting caught up in things that do not matter, Thoreau figures that he has found the superior way of living and has become one with nature, with all the materials that are already available on earth. Everything else is just fluff. He intended to live on his terms and how he thinks life should be lived, simple and not losing sight of the importance of living each day as if it were your last.