

Walden Journal

By Harsh Patel

Chapter One: Economy

Date: June 22, 2019

The novel begins with Thoreau explaining how he has lived alone in a cabin at Walden Pond for over two years. He also describes how other people reacted to what he did. "Some have asked what I got to eat; if I did not feel lonesome; if I was not afraid; and the like" (page 3). He explains that he did this because he wanted to show the benefits of living a simple life for someone's well being. He argues that working more than is required for survival can have people lose inner freedom because they're working harder and longer to get more stuff, which limits what a person can do. He goes to Walden Pond to survive with the bare minimum of things he deems "necessary of life", which he said are "Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel". Thoreau decides to live off the land and limit human interaction because nature can provide for the four necessities of survival. He creates a house from scratch by using a borrowed axe to cut down trees, which he would return after he is done. On July 4th, 1845, Thoreau moved into the small house he created.

This first chapter took me by surprise because it had a lot more background and details than I was expecting. I assumed that the book focus more on Thoreau's experiences in the woods and explain what he got out of it at the end of the book, however, it felt like instead he explained what he got out of his journey at the beginning. The detail that the books has also shows how much thought Thoreau put into what he was doing. He gives details such as what he bought, how much it cost, how he repaid it, and even the market price of the things he sold to make a profit. This shows that Thoreau planned out this trip extensively.

Chapter Two: Where I Lived and What I Lived For

Date: June 23, 2019

Thoreau discusses several other places he nearly settled before choosing Walden Pond and his interest in buying a farm nearby. Before he was able to purchase it, however, the owners decided to keep the farm, forcing Thoreau to give up the farmland. Thoreau makes the most of the situation. He realizes that by going to the woods to farm instead, he will be more disconnected from society and have less constrictions. He also thinks that going to the wood will give him more freedom because, like he said in the previous chapter, society and modern life are constricting and limit individual freedom, so by using the woods he won't be as constrained. He explains this when he says "I am monarch of all I survey, My right there is none to dispute" (page 88). He ends the chapter with urging the readers to continue life until we hit rock bottom, and then gauge the reality of things and what truly matters.

Throughout this entire chapter, inconveniences have been popping up for Thoreau, however he has stayed positive and tried to make the most of his situation. An example of this is when he talks about how his walls are poorly insulated, but he says that it okay because it brings in fresh air at night. These reactions to problems that Thoreau faced show his mindset of the time he spent at Walden Pond. He took the optimistic view for the problems and found a way that he could benefit from them instead, and that is probably why he managed to survive over two years at Walden Pond while someone else, such as me, would have probably given up.

Chapter Three: Reading

Date: June 25, 2019

*Thoreau discusses how because he has moved to Walden Pond, he has been able to indulge more into his hobby of reading. He talks a lot about the benefits of reading, such as when he quoted the poet Mir Camar Uddin Mast, " Being seated to run through the region of the spiritual world ; I have had this advantage in books. To be intoxicated by a single glass of wine ; I have experienced this pleasure when I have drunk the liquor of the esoteric doctrines" (page 107). During his time homebuilding, Thoreau kept a copy of the *Iliad* on his desk, however he was too busy with his life. Now that he has taken full control of his life, Thoreau has been able to read more and more. He argues that everyone should expand their reading material, and even criticizes people who limit their reading, such as only reading the Bible. He talks about how even though modern society is technologically progressing, cultural progress and progress for the human mind has been ignored.*

This chapter shows Thoreau's opinion on society and the people within it. He believes that culture has been slowing down and not being developed as much as it should. Although I do not believe that cultural development is as important as technological development, I still agree with Thoreau that it shouldn't be ignored. I also believe that books aren't necessarily the only answer to it, especially in our time.

Chapter Four: Sounds

Date: June 25, 2019

This chapter is a sharp contrast to the previous chapter in terms of Thoreau's opinions on books. While in the previous chapter Thoreau discussed extensively on the benefits of reading, in this chapter he says that reading isn't merely enough, and that we need to experience the world for ourselves with our own eyes, not just by reading them. He also focuses on the individual in this chapter, such as how he describes himself sitting in tranquility alone. This is also a sharp contrast to the previous chapter, in which he focused on society and culture instead of the individual. It ends with Thoreau describing how he is disconnected from civilization and nature is starting to surround him more and more.

I personally did not enjoy this chapter as much as the previous ones. It felt almost jarring and a tonal shift from the previous one, which so far I think is the best chapter. It also spends a lot more time focusing on the environment around Walden Pond and less on himself. For example, Thoreau describes the sounds of the Fitchburg Railroad and the trains on it for multiple paragraphs, which I did not find very interesting.

Chapter Five: Solitude

Date: June 26, 2019

This chapter continues with the idea from the previous of Thoreau getting closer with nature and farther from human society. He does this when he describes his evening. "A delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself" (page 138). When he returns home, he finds that some visitors had passed by his house. He later describes that his feeling of solitude is so great that even though he has a neighbor only a mile away, it feels like he is on a completely different continent. Thoreau starts to fill his solitude from human by connecting with nature. He starts to praise nature and the benefits of connecting with it.

If there is one thing that me and Thoreau can agree on, it would be "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (page 145). Something we would disagree on, however, is the importance of nature. I was never much of an outside person and I never really did connect with nature in a "spiritual matter" like Thoreau does. Instead, I appreciate the complexities of nature and how it was created all completely randomly. I also believe that humans inherently want companionship, so I believe that Thoreau is using nature to avoid loneliness from the lack of human connections he has at Walden Pond.

Chapter Six: Visitors

Date: July 1, 2019

Thoreau tells the reader that even though he purposely left civilization, he still enjoys society and companionship. In his Walden Pond home, he keeps chairs ready for any visitors. He does acknowledge the limitations of his house being small, so he typically tries to move the conversation to the forest outside. Unlike most hosts, he provides more mental/spiritual things rather than material ones. For example, Thoreau commented that if there isn't enough food, he and his guests would not eat. However, even with his unorthodox hosting strategy, guests still keep visiting him. He says that his remote location usually filters out less interesting guests because most of the people who visit him aren't doing something trivial. Thoreau also notices the trend that women and children enjoy the woods more than men do. He speculates that is because in his time, men don't focus on the pleasures of rural life, but instead on limitations, such as having to walk to town because of their location.

Thoreau again flips what he was leading to from his previous chapters. While in his previous chapters he focuses on isolation and being away from society to embrace nature, in this one he focuses on embracing people and companionships with other humans. I feel like there is a lot of flipping in the ideas that Thoreau is leading to in this book. I would have liked if he would spend more time discussing the ideas he is trying to convey to the reader.

Chapter Seven: The Bean Field

Date: July 2, 2019

*This chapter focuses on how Thoreau is surviving in Walden Pond. It discusses how Thoreau has planted miles of crops, such as potatoes, turnips, and peas, and most of all, beans. While tending to his crops, Thoreau finds evidence the land being owned by someone before him. He finds things such as arrowheads and shards of pottery, which shows there was some other culture that lived on the land before. From his farming, Thoreau manages to make a \$9 profit by earning \$24 and only needing to spend \$15 for crops. Adjusting for inflation from when *Walden* was published (1854), he would have made a profit of around \$270 in modern currency. However, even with this profit, Thoreau says that he doesn't farm for money, but instead to improve his self-discipline.*

This chapter feels a lot more like chapter one because of its focus on how he is surviving and less on trying to teach a lesson. It helps us imagine what Thoreau is doing at Walden Pond and how he is able to survive all on his own. I didn't feel much of a connection to any specific idea in this chapter, but instead it just helps with understanding what Thoreau is doing.

Chapter Eight: The Village

Date: July 5, 2019

In this chapter, Thoreau talks about what he does when he visits the nearby village. He tells the reader he visits the village every day or two to hear gossip and visit the townsmen. While in the marketplace, Thoreau tells the reader about how he has no interest in anything being sold there, and goes back home without staying in the marketplace for too long. Thoreau often had to make his way back to his house in the dark, but he has gotten accustomed to the path after being on it many times. After explaining his usual routine, he tells us how he got arrested and put in jail one time for not paying a tax. He tells the reader he did this because he doesn't recognize the authority of the state. However, even though he was put into jail, he doesn't show any interest in it. Thoreau explains that the only thing he fears being disturbed by is the government. He doesn't even hide any of his belongings or refuse any visitors because in his eyes, theft only exists when "some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough" (page 186).

This was a relatively short chapter that, just like the previous one, focused more on Thoreau's daily life and how he survived. From this chapter, it feels like Thoreau doesn't like the government of the US because of slavery. He refused the tax because he doesn't support "the state which buys and sells men, women, and children, like cattle at the door of its senate-house" (page 185). This was before the Civil War so he was most likely referring to slavery. I am confused, however, on the "senate-house" part. Massachusetts, where Walden Pond is, abolished slavery in 1783, and the slave trade was abolished in DC in 1850 by the Compromise of 1850, four years before Walden was published.

Chapter Eleven: Higher Laws

Date: July 5, 2019

On his walk back home, Thoreau notices a woodchuck and gets the desire to “devour him raw”. He tells the reader that he wasn’t hungry, he just felt the desire to eat it. He says that this is because of his dark and savage nature, and claims he values it just as much as his noble and spiritual nature. However, after this, Thoreau admits that even though he is a skilled fisherman, he has become reluctant in fishing. He turns to vegetarianism instead because he feels that slaughtering animals isn’t necessary and eating crops would be simpler.

When I first read the beginning of this chapter, I had to reread it because I thought I misread something. Thoreau told the reader that he wanted to eat the woodchuck, not for survival or necessity, but just because he felt like it, and I was not expecting that. I found this to be one of the more confusing chapters and had to rely on online resources to understand it. However, even with the help of the internet, I still didn’t understand this chapter that well.

Chapter Twelve: Brute Neighbors

Date: July 8, 2019

Thoreau talks about a companion he has that accompanies him on his fishing trips. He tries to explain to us their conversations, although I didn't really get it. After this, Thoreau plays with the mice in his house, and describes a mouse that took some cheese Thoreau put on his hand. He also sees other types of animals, such as wild birds which he calls his "hens and chickens". Half a mile from his home, he creates a well where he gets water, eats his lunch, reads books, and interact with nature. He gives us examples of times he interacted with nature, such as when he saw an ant war between an army of red and black ants. Thoreau takes three ants to his cabin to observe them. Using a microscope, he watches decapitations and cannibalism, and releases the survivor after he is done observing. Thoreau also sees lots of domesticated cats in the woods. Even if they weren't wild, he notices that they're still used to the woods. He thinks its because they enjoy nature and the woods as much as he does.

I never liked insects, but most of all I never liked ants. I shivered multiple times from thinking of ants in this chapter, especially the part where he observed the ants. It shows that I definitely would not be able survive at Walden Pond like Thoreau did. I have a newfound respect for what Thoreau is doing because I certainly wouldn't be able to do it.

Chapter Thirteen: House-Warming

Date: July 9, 2019

Thoreau walks through the meadows in order to look for apples and chestnuts. However, he is angry from people taking most of them to sell to other places such as Boston and New York. There was still enough for him to eat however. He admires the changing leaves of fall, however he is aware that it marks winter is going to start. He tries to stay in the sun as much as possible because he prefers it to fire, which he calls artificial. By November, Walden Pond has begun to freeze, and Thoreau walks on the thin surface to watch what is happening in the lake. Afterwards, Thoreau gathers firewood because it has become necessary to have good fire now that it is winter. He comments how the poor and the privileged require fire for survival.

As I commented in the first chapter, Thoreau has planned extensively to survive alone at Walden Pond. He has managed to produce enough supplies in the summer to keep himself alive in winter and he is even able to plan out gathering firewood.

Chapter Sixteen: The Pond in Winter

Date: July 11, 2019

After Thoreau wakes up, the first thing he does is collect water for the day. It has become more difficult because of the water freezing over. He is soon joined by a group of fishermen who are there to catch some fish. Because of local rumors that say the pond is bottomless, Thoreau uses a fishing line with a stone at the end to measure how deep it is, and measures it at over 100ft. He does this multiple times to get a general shape for the bottom of the pond. He concludes that the deepest point is at the point of the greatest length and width. He wonders if this is always the case, so he tests his hypothesis at nearby White Pond, which does support his hypothesis.

This chapter feels like Thoreau is trying to get entertainment and keep his mind busy because of the weather. Now that he can't focus on nature because of most animals not coming out in winter, he focuses on other things to keep himself from being bored. If I was in his situation, I would probably do a very similar thing to keep myself entertained. I also like how he manages to test out his theory in White Pond, which again keeps himself from getting bored.

Chapter Seventeen: Spring

Date: July 13, 2019

April has begun, and the ice at Walden Pond starts to melt, which delights Thoreau. He talks about an old man he knows that has a lot of wisdom and experience with nature, but still is scared by the crash of melting ice. Thoreau is inspired by the better weather to go back to fishing in Walden Pond. He states that his adventure is complete, and leaves Walden Pond on September 6, 1847.

Although this was an average sized chapter, I didn't think there was a lot of new information in here. It was mostly a way to conclude Thoreau's journey and prepare us for the conclusion. This chapter is almost a recap of what Thoreau has learned in the past two years, such as the emotions and passion he feels for nature and his surroundings.

Chapter Eighteen: Conclusion

Date: July 13, 2019

Thoreau starts the conclusion by talking about how doctors recommend a change of scenery for sick people. Thoreau, however, thinks it isn't the change of scenery that is important, but instead a change in someone's soul. He uses this as a justification for why leaving Walden Pond is just as good as going in the first place. That is, he believes it is better to experience as many things as possible and not be stuck in one place for too long. He also urges the reader to sell all of our fancy clothes and our other civilized stuff in order to find out "true selves". He says the average "John or Jonathan" that would read this will not understand him, but he says that won't matter. He ends the book by saying "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star".

After reading this book, I would probably fall into the "John or Jonathan" category, as Thoreau described. Although I understand where Thoreau is coming from and why he, personally, did what he did, I still would not have done it. I don't believe in the idea of people finding their "true selves" by going out and having a change in perspective. I also do not believe in going as extreme as Thoreau wants us to go to escape our lives, such as selling fancy items or exploring somewhere else for a long period of time.

Doing Nothing by Sue Monk Kidd

Date: July 26, 2019

This is a blog post about the author Sue Monk Kidd giving us her opinions on Thoreau and her experience in doing a "Thoreau experiment". It starts out with her explaining that for she has enjoyed writing, speaking and travelling for several years, however she would like a break from it. She also tells the reader that she has been a fan of Walden since the age of 15 and wants to do something similar to what Thoreau did. Because of this, she goes to an island along the coast of Florida to have her "own Walden Pond". One of the main things she does to copy Thoreau is to sit out on her porch and just watch her surroundings, which is very similar to what Thoreau did. At first, she had a nagging feeling that all she was doing was wasting time, however, she eventually enjoyed doing it, as shown from the last words in her blog, "How beautiful nothing can be".

Just like Thoreau, the author didn't plan the trip on being a permanent lifestyle change, but instead just something temporary. I think one of the key differences between Thoreau and Sue Monk Kidd, however, are their reasons for doing their respective trips. Thoreau did it in order to find his "true self" and change his perspective on the world, while it felt like Sue Monk Kidd was doing this trip as more of a break before getting back to what she was doing. Because of that, I agree more with Sue Monk Kidd and her mindset instead of Thoreau's.

Walden on Wheels: On the Open Road from Debt to Freedom by Ken Ilgunas

Date: August 2, 2019

This memoir is about how Ken Ilgunas survived in University by living as much of a cheap and simple life as possible in order to pay for his student loans without getting in debt. He did this by buying an old, worn down van for \$1,500 and living in it with only the bare minimum to survive. He talks about how due to things such as books, school fees, car insurance, etc., he had to cut down even things we would consider vital, such as food. He made money by being a participant at his University's neuroscience department, where he was voluntarily experimented on for \$10-20 an hour. He also describes the conditions of his van and how he had to sleep in the cold because the van didn't protect from the cold. On the positive side, the life he was living was affordable, and he managed to get a tax return of \$1,600. However, after he spent more money on a better lifestyle because he thought he could afford it, he realized that it wasn't necessary, and that things such as phones and TVs weren't important, but instead community and being a part of society was what was meaningful. He went back to his old lifestyle and described how the van felt more like a real home rather than an experiment, and continued with doing that in his fall semester.

Unlike Thoreau, Ken Ilgunas lived a simple and less consumerist lifestyle out of necessity, even if he eventually came to a similar mindset that Thoreau had by the end of the memoir. And unlike Thoreau and Sue Monk Kidd, I would have done something similar to Ken Ilgunas if I was in his situation because it was necessary.

Walden: Living Deliberately by Bill McKibben

Date: August 12, 2019

This passage was written as an introduction to an edition of Walden which talks about Thoreau's life and his impact on the world. It also focuses on how even if Thoreau wasn't alive in the Information Age, many of his teachings still apply to the modern world.

After reading Walden, I feel like a lot of the things he is over exaggerated due to the author's opinion on Thoreau. This passage clearly shows the author is a strong fan of Thoreau and wants to spread his belief. For example, he says things such as, "And it is here that Thoreau comes to the rescue", and he even puts Thoreau on the same level as the Buddha, Jesus, and Gandhi by saying he is their "American incarnation". The author is constantly putting Thoreau as a larger-than-life genius who was able to predict how our modern times would function. When the author starts listing off problems with our modern world, he claims, "Thoreau knew nothing of it, and yet he knew it all". I don't personally agree with this author's opinion on Thoreau and I don't like this passage because it feels more like an over exaggerated opinion of Thoreau rather than something useful.

Vocabulary Appendix

1. ***Impertinent:*** not showing proper respect; rude.
2. ***Teamster:*** a driver of a team of animals.
3. ***Improvvidence:*** neglecting to provide for future needs.
4. ***Reverence:*** deep respect for someone or something.
5. ***Apotheosized:*** elevate to, or as if to, the rank of a god; idolize.
6. ***Geogaws:*** a showy thing, especially one that is useless or worthless.
7. ***indweller:*** to abide within, as a guiding force, motivating principle, etc.
8. ***Thematically:*** in a way that relates to the subjects or themes of something.
9. ***Behindhand:*** late or slow in doing something, especially paying a debt.
10. ***Forthwith:*** immediately; without delay.
11. ***Undulations:*** the action of moving smoothly up and down.
12. ***Sensuous:*** relating to or affecting the senses rather than the intellect.
13. ***Frittered:*** waste time, money, or energy on trifling matters.
14. ***Colloquies:*** a conversation.
15. ***Corrugations:*** a wrinkle; fold; furrow; ridge.
16. ***Magnanimity:*** the virtue of being great of mind and heart.
17. ***Pedagogue:*** a teacher, especially a strict or pedantic one.
18. ***Copious:*** abundant in supply or quantity.
19. ***Sumachs:*** a shrub or small tree of the cashew family, with compound leaves, fruits in conical clusters, and bright autumn colors.
20. ***Threnodies:*** a wailing ode, song, hymn or poem of mourning composed or performed as a memorial to a dead person.
21. ***Remunerat:*** the pay or other compensation provided in exchange for an employee's services performed
22. ***Loquacious:*** tending to talk a great deal; talkative.
23. ***Almshouse:*** a house built originally by a charitable person or organization for poor people to live in.

- 24. Cinquefoil:** *a widely distributed herbaceous plant of the rose family, with compound leaves of five leaflets and five-petaled yellow flowers.*
- 25. Perennial plant:** *a plant that lives more than two years.*
- 26. Tantivy:** *a rapid gallop or ride.*
- 27. Repastination:** *the act of digging over again this continual motion.*
- 28. Tempestuous:** *very stormy.*
- 29.**