

Walden Main Text

Hi, this is AJ again. Welcome to the next lesson. This week's lesson is called "Walden." And we're going to talk about a book with the same name, Walden, by a writer named Henry David Thoreau. Now Thoreau is probably my favorite American writer, I guess maybe my favorite writer in general. He wrote back during the American Civil War, prior to the American Civil War, and his book Walden is his most famous book. Now it's quite difficult. There's a lot of big vocabulary in this book. And also the writing style is kind of old, very, very, very formal English and a little bit of an old style of English. So I'm going to read one paragraph from the book and then I'll talk about it more. And that paragraph may be quite difficult for you, but don't worry. I'll explain it after.

Now, Walden, the book, is about an experiment, an experience that Henry David Thoreau had. He decided to go and live in the woods. Go away from the town where he was into the woods, into the forest, and then build a very small little simple house and live in it by himself. And just think and relax and live a very simple life. And then he wrote a book about this experience. Now, of course, this is something that people have done for centuries and centuries, holy people, religious people, spiritual people, philosophers.

In many different periods of history, in many different locations in the world, they've gone off by themselves to some small remote place away from other people to think, to live simply. And of course we have a lot of great intellectual breakthroughs from these people. So it's a long tradition to do this and Henry David Thoreau was following the same tradition. And it's not a usual thing for Americans, I would say. He was maybe one of the first Americans to do this and write about it. I'm sure many did it but he wrote about his experience. And this book is a book about his experience, his experiment, but more so it's a book about his philosophy, a philosophy of life that he developed while living in the woods alone.

And the main part of this philosophy is to live simply. That in fact we don't need so much in terms of things, buying things, getting lots of things. So even at that time in the United States people were always trying to get more, more, more...bigger, bigger, bigger house...more, more, more money...more, more, more nice furniture. Just always buying things and of course today we have more, more, more computers and iPods and phones and bigger cars and nicer stuff. All the time people want more, more, more. And he was saying this is a source of unhappiness if you're always trying to get more and more and more you will never be happy. And so his idea was actually to be happy with what you need and then focus on doing other things. Instead of always trying to get more, more, more, live more simply and you will have a lot of time for yourself. You'll work much less. You'll enjoy your life. So that is the basic philosophy of

Henry David Thoreau. It's also a very Buddhist or Taoist philosophy. A lot of different religions and spiritual practices have this similar philosophy. So anyway, let me read this paragraph about his experiment and then we'll talk about it a little more. Here we go.

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. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws will be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. 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.

Okay, that is the paragraph. What does it mean? Let's talk about it. I'll go from the beginning and discuss the meaning of this. Now the beginning part he says if one (it means someone) advances confidently (strongly) in the direction of his dream (of their dream), and endeavors (and tries) to live the life they have imagined, they will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. What that means is if you try to live your dream you will be successful. You'll be surprised that if you really are confident and strong, you say "I will do this," whatever your dream is, whatever your big goal is, if you just start working towards it and trying to get it that you'll be surprised at your success. You will succeed. It will be less difficult than you imagined.

And then he talks about, y'know, new laws will open around this person...what he's saying is that the universe or God or the Tao, whatever your belief is, that it will help you. That in fact, that the more confident you are, the more strongly you try to get your dreams, you will get help. Things will happen to help you. Y'know, if you're religious, y'know, maybe you think God is going to help you. But God's going to wait until you are confident, until you actually try to live your biggest dream. And if you do that and you keep trying and you're strong and you believe, then God will give you help.

And if you're not religious and you don't believe in God, maybe it's, y'know, the Tao, or the force of the universe or, y'know, maybe it's your unconscious mind that's going to give you that help. Whatever it is, some force or forces will help you. You won't be alone. That's what he's saying. So he's basically saying to have faith, believe. Believe in your dream. Try to get your dream and if you do it you're going to succeed. It's going to be easier. Things will happen to help you. So that's the first part of the paragraph.

In the second part of the paragraph he says that the more you simplify your life, the easier life becomes, that's what that means. In proportion as you simplify your life the laws of the universe will appear less complex. What that means is the more you make

your life simple, the easier your life becomes. Everything becomes easier. It's easier to succeed. It's easier to do everything. You have less stress in your life. Everything becomes much, much easier the more your life is simplified.

And then finally he says if you have built castles in the air, your work is not lost. That's where they should be. Put the foundations under them. Castles in the air, I'll talk about this in vocabulary, but castles in the air just means dreaming big. It's a slang phrase, an idiom actually, and it just means if you build castles in the air, to build castles in the air, means to dream big, right? You're not building a house on the ground. You're building your house up in the air. You're dreaming a big dream. He's saying that that is great. That's fantastic. You should dream very, very big. Don't have small dreams. Have really big dreams.

He says but the next step is you must do something. Don't just dream. Just dreaming is not enough. If you dream only, nothing will happen. He says you have to put the foundations under the castle, under the house. That means you have to take action. You have to take action. You have to dream a really big dream, that's the first step. But the second step, you have to take action. You actually have to work to get that dream. So he's saying yes, dream big, but also take action.

Alright, so that is the end of the Walden main story here. I hope you enjoyed it. Walden is a fantastic book but I warn you, it is quite difficult so reading the whole thing might be very difficult for most non-native speakers. In fact, it can be a difficult book even for native speakers. But I hope you get a little bit of the idea of Walden and of Thoreau's philosophy just from this paragraph alone.

Okay, see you in the vocabulary lesson.