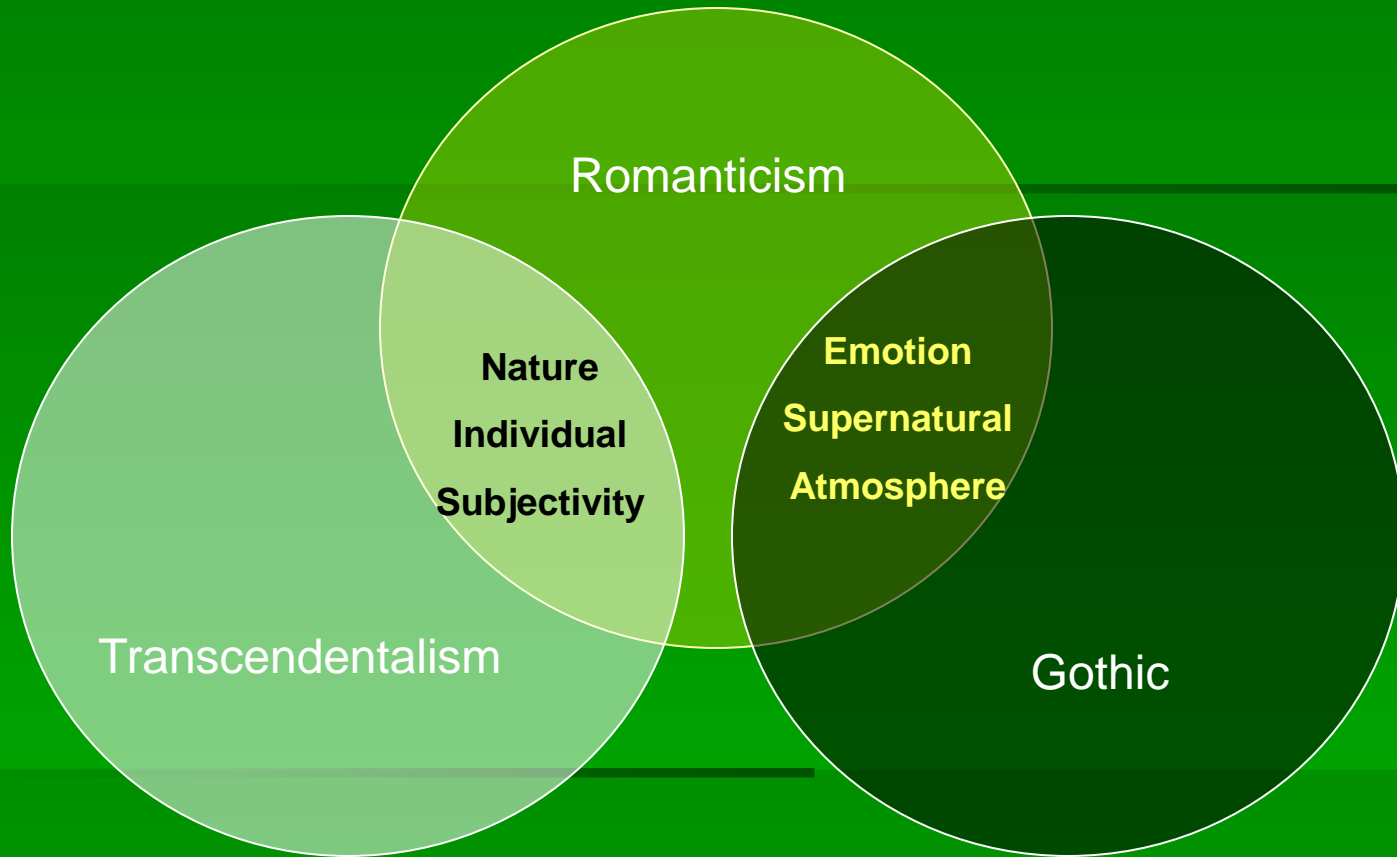


# **American Transcendentalism**

**“It was a high counsel that I once  
heard given to a young person,  
‘Always do what you are afraid to do.’”  
– Ralph Waldo Emerson**



# Transcendentalism

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- Proposes a belief in a higher reality than that found in sense experience or in a higher kind of knowledge than that achieved by human reason.
- Suggests that every individual is capable of discovering this higher truth on his or her own, through **intuition**

# Deism

- Transcendentalism was strongly influenced by Deism
- Deists hold that a certain kind of religious knowledge is either inherent in each person or accessible through the exercise of reason.



# Transcendental Beliefs

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- ✓ **Intuition**, not reason, is the highest human faculty
- ✓ A rejection of materialism
- ✓ **Simplicity** is the path to spiritual greatness
- ✓ **Nature** is a source of truth & inspiration
- ✓ **Non-conformity, individuality & self-reliance**

# Transcendentalism

- Unlike the Puritans, the Transcendentalists saw humans and nature as possessing an innate **goodness**.

# Born Bad or Good?

Puritans

Humans =  
Sinful



Enlightenment

Humans =  
Blank Slate



Transcendentalists

Humans = Good





# Nature & the Oversoul

- Transcendentalist writers expressed semi-religious feelings toward nature
- They saw a direct connection between the universe & the individual soul
- Divinity permeated all objects, animate or inanimate
- The purpose of human life was union with the “Oversoul” – a sort of convergence of the individual, God & Nature

# The Oversoul

“The groves were God’s first temples”  
– Willam Cullen Bryant

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“In the faces of men and women I see God.”  
– Walt Whitman

# Transcendentalism

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- Transcendentalists believed that **humanity was Godlike** and saw the world in which only **good** existed
- They chose to **focus on the positive** rather than evil & darkness

- <sup>26</sup>And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...
- <sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

- <sup>10</sup>And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that **it was good**.
- <sup>12</sup>And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that **it was good**.

The groves were God's first temples.

Ere man learned

To hew the shaft, and lay the architrave,

And spread the roof above them—ere

he framed

The lofty vault, to gather and roll back

The sound of anthems; in the darkling

wood,

Amid the cool and silence, he knelt down,

And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks

And supplication.

- William Cullen Bryant  
from "A Forest Hymn"

# The Transcendentalists

- American Transcendentalism began with the formation in 1836 of the **Transcendental Club** in Boston
- Magazine: *The Dial*
- **Brook Farm**: communal living experiment
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - Margaret Fuller
  - Henry David Thoreau
  - Bronson Alcott

# Major Transcendentalist Works

- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**
  - “Self-Reliance” 1841
- **Henry David Thoreau**
  - *Walden* 1854
  - “Civil Disobedience”



# Anti-Transcendentalists

- Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Herman Melville
- ❖ Explore the **darker** side of nature and human nature
- ❖ Consider life in its tragic dimension, a combination of **good and evil**



# Transcendentalist Authors

# Margaret Fuller

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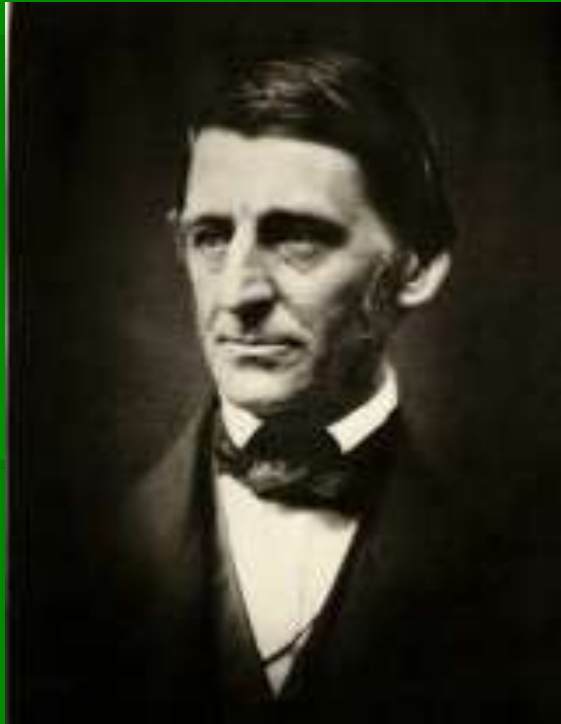
# Margaret Fuller (1810-1850)

- American writer, journalist, and philosopher, was part of the Transcendentalist circle.
- Margaret Fuller's "conversations" encouraged the women of Boston to develop their intellectual capacities.
- Her major work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845, profoundly affected the women's rights movement which had its formal beginning at Seneca Falls, New York, three years later.

# Margaret Fuller

- “What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely, and unimpeded to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home.”
- “In order that she may be able to give her hand with dignity, she must be able to stand alone.”
- “I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own.”

# “Self-Reliance”



Ralph Waldo Emerson

# “Self-Reliance” - Emerson

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- “There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that **envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide...**”
- “Trust thyself...”

# “Self-Reliance” - Emerson

- “Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist.”
- “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.”



“No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it...”

“What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule...may serve for the whole—distinction between greatness and meanness. It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude...”

- “For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure.”
- “The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loathe to disappoint them...”
- “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds...”

“Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said today. – ‘Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.’” – Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. **To be great is to be misunderstood.”**

# Other Emerson Quotations

- “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.”
- “All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.”
- “The only way to have a friend is to be one.”

# Other Emerson Quotations

- “The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it.”
- “What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.”
- “Make yourself necessary to someone.”

# From “Nature”

“Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. **In the woods, is perpetual youth.**”



# From “Nature”

“In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity...which nature cannot repair...In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.”



# From “The American Scholar”

- “In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.”

# From “The American Scholar”

- “...the ancient precept, “Know thyself,” and the modern precept, “Study nature,” become at last one maxim.”
- “...Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire.”

# Walden, or Life in the Woods



Henry David Thoreau

"Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth."  
- *Walden*

Thoreau criticized the direction in which civilization was going, particularly commercialization:

- "To have done anything just for money is to have been truly idle."
- "Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. " - *Walden*

Thoreau criticized the direction in which civilization was going, particularly commercialization:

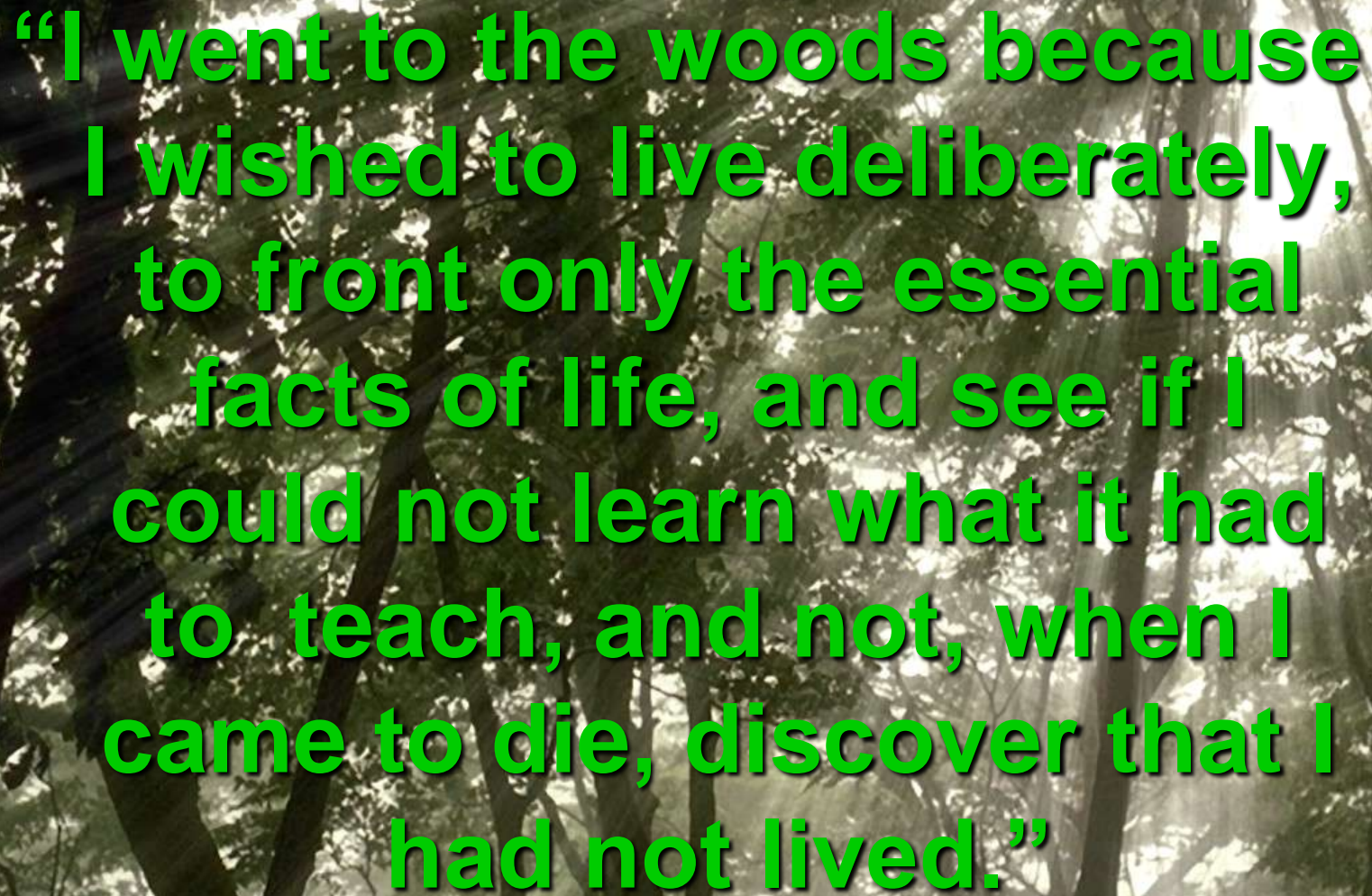
- "Thank God men cannot as yet fly and lay waste the sky as well as the earth!"
- "If a man walks in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer. But if he spends his days as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is deemed an industrious and enterprising citizen."



# **Walden, or Life in the Woods**

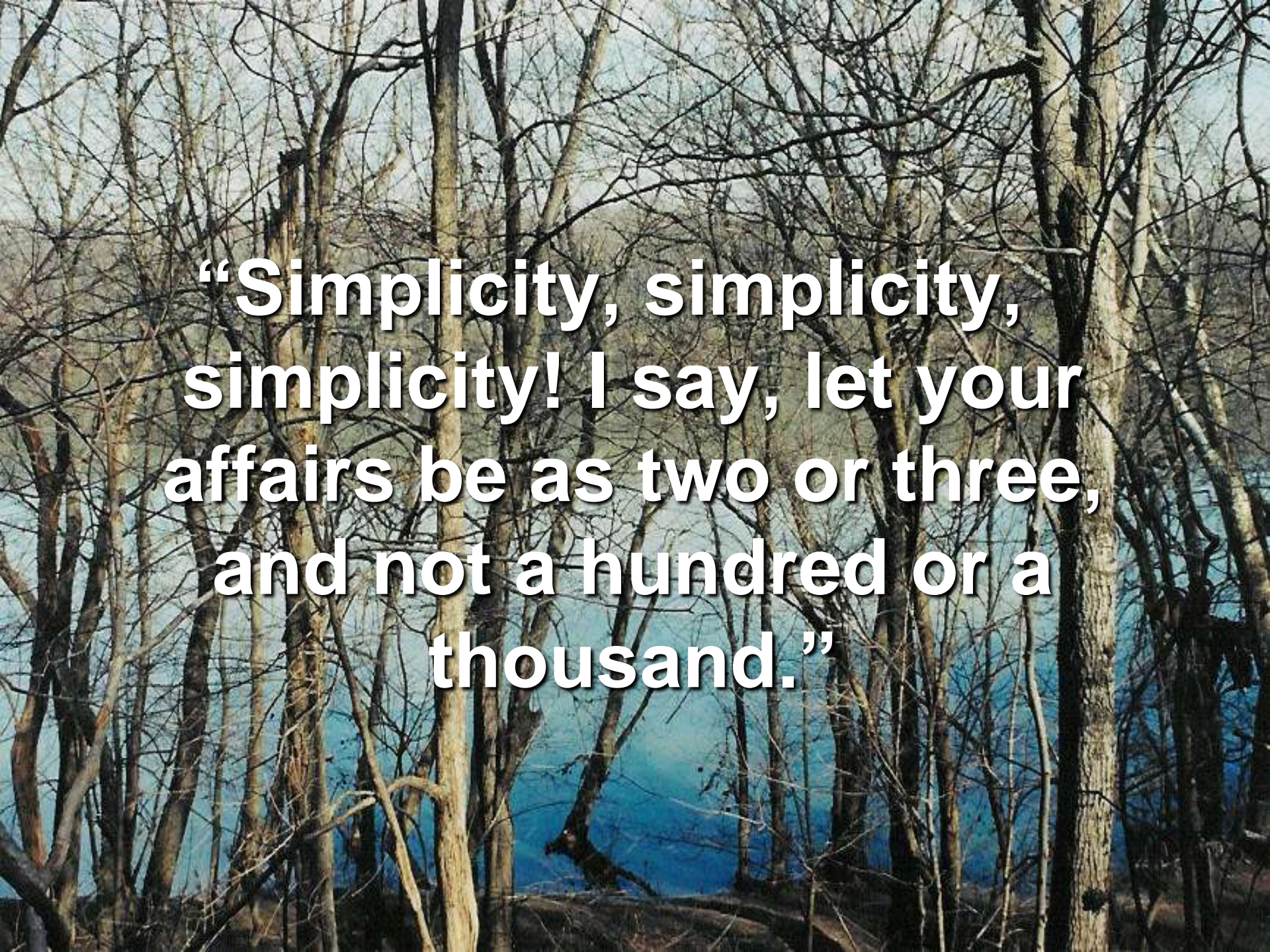
- On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1845 Thoreau began his experiment in “essential” living—living simply, studying the natural world, and seeking truth within himself.
- On land owned by Emerson near Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau built a small cabin by Walden Pond and lived there for more than two years, writing and studying nature.





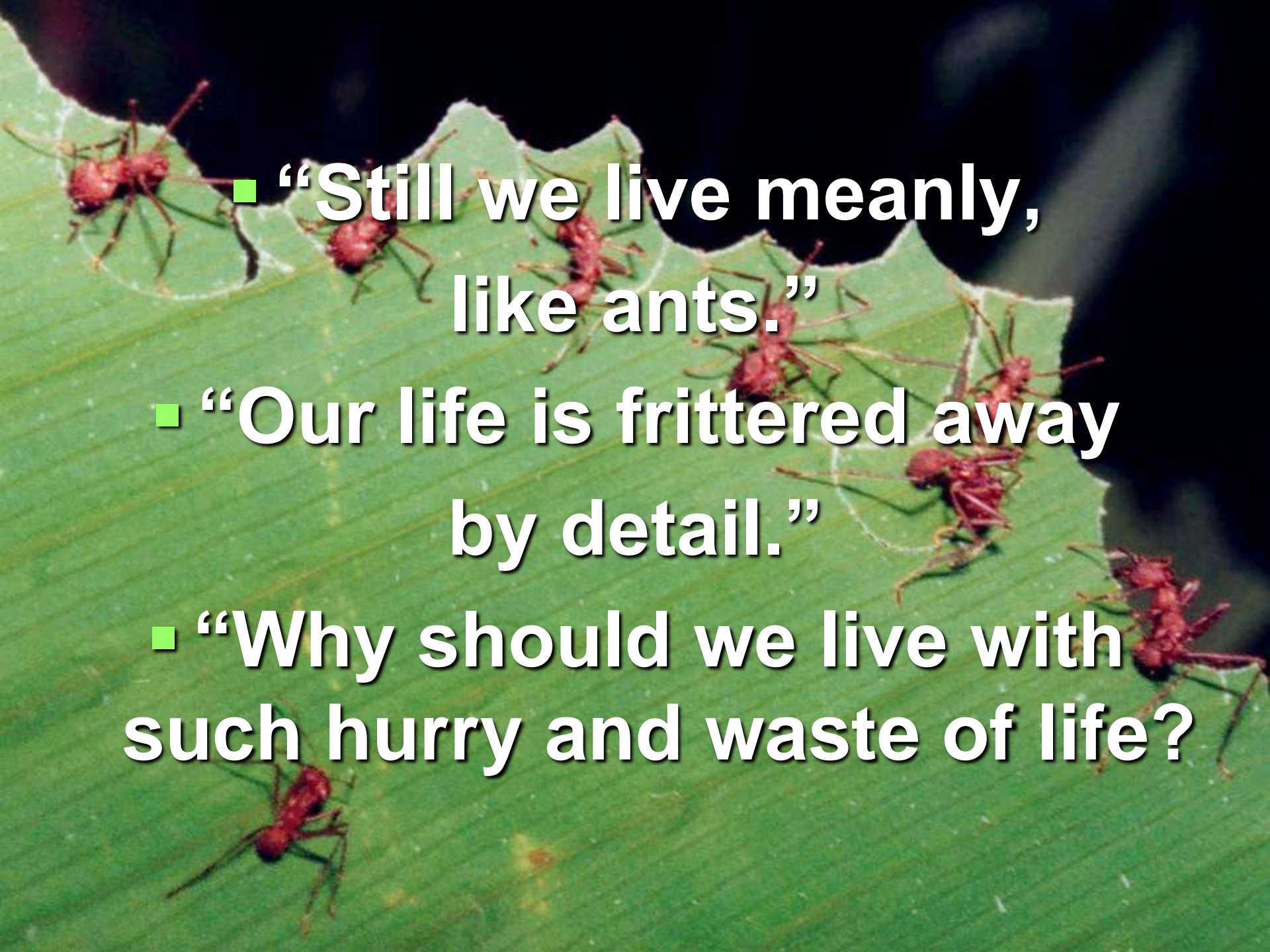
**“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”**



A photograph of a dense forest of bare trees, likely in late autumn or winter. The trees are thin and their branches are intricate and dark against a clear, bright blue sky. The lighting is natural, creating a serene and somewhat somber atmosphere.

**“Simplicity, simplicity,  
simplicity! I say, let your  
affairs be as two or three,  
and not a hundred or a  
thousand.”**





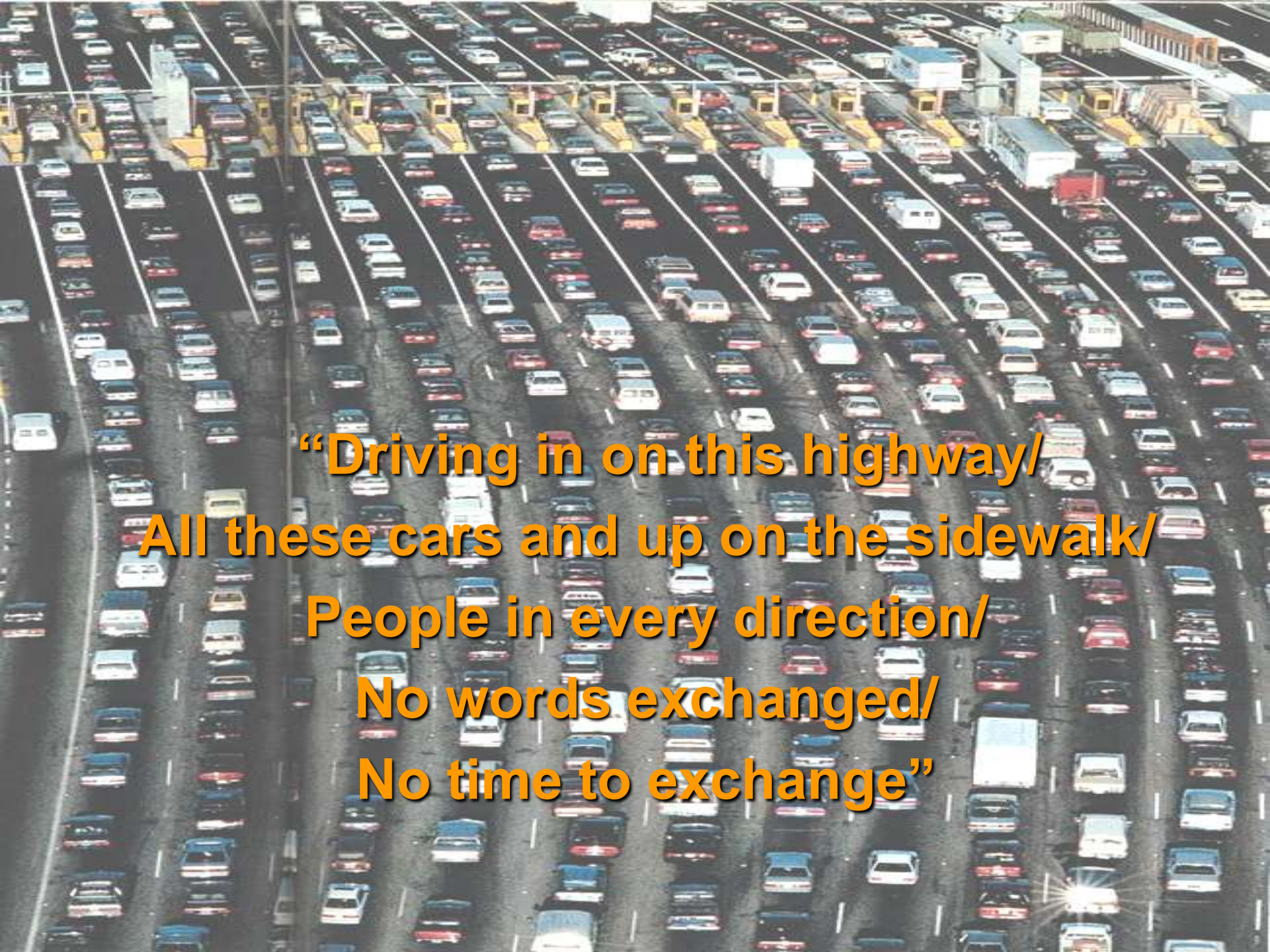
- **“Still we live meanly,  
like ants.”**
- **“Our life is frittered away  
by detail.”**
- **“Why should we live with  
such hurry and waste of life?”**



## *Ants Marching* – Dave Matthews Band

- “He wakes up in the morning/Does his teeth, bite to eat and he’s rolling/Never changes a thing/The week ends, the week begins”
- “Take these chances/Place them in a box until a quieter time/Lights down, you up and die”





**“Driving in on this highway/  
All these cars and up on the sidewalk/  
People in every direction/  
No words exchanged/  
No time to exchange”**



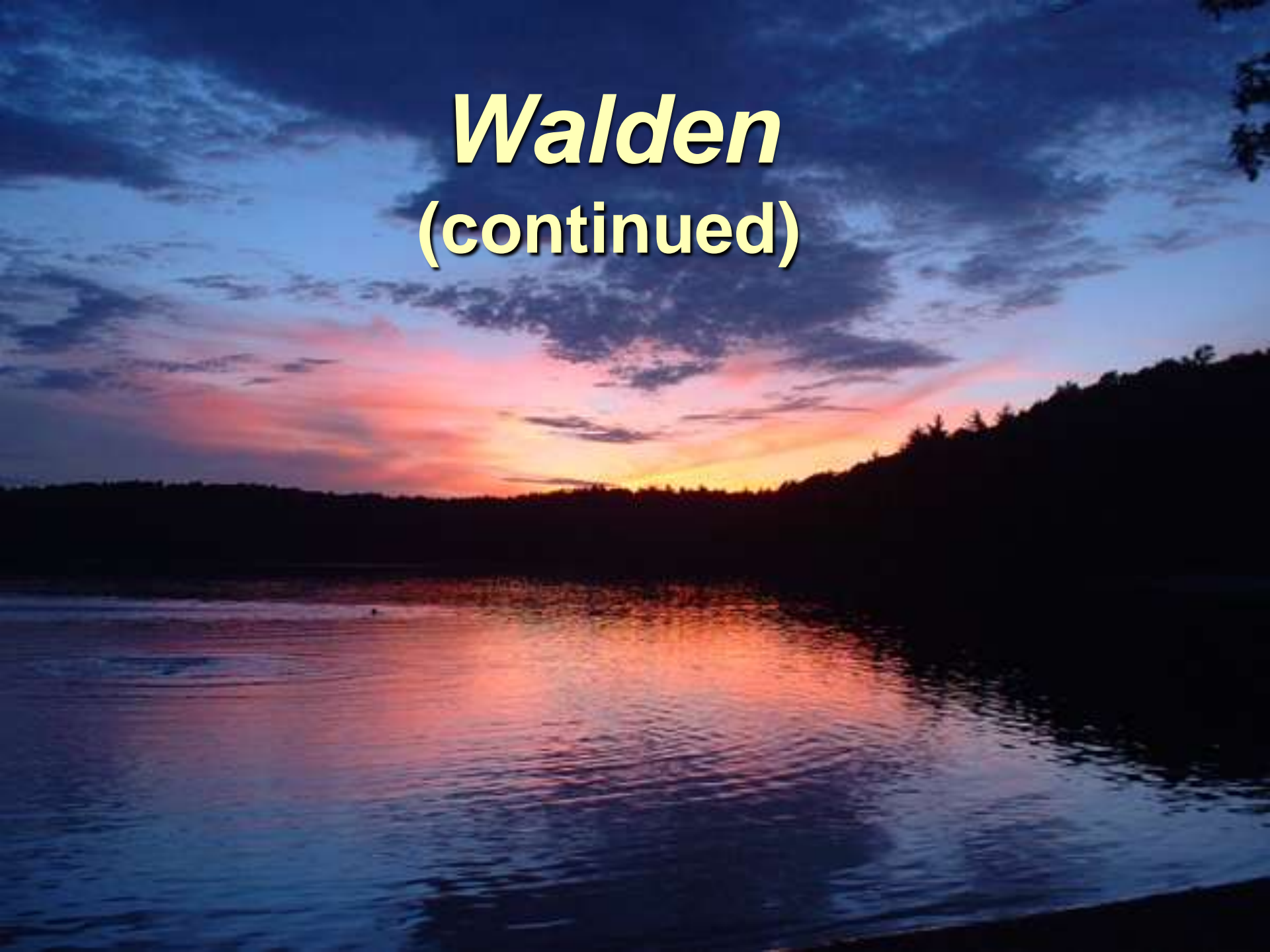
**“All the little ants are marching/ Red and black antennae waving/ They all do it the same/ They all do it the same way”**

[www.myrmecos.net](http://www.myrmecos.net)


© Alex Wild 2005



# *Walden* (continued)

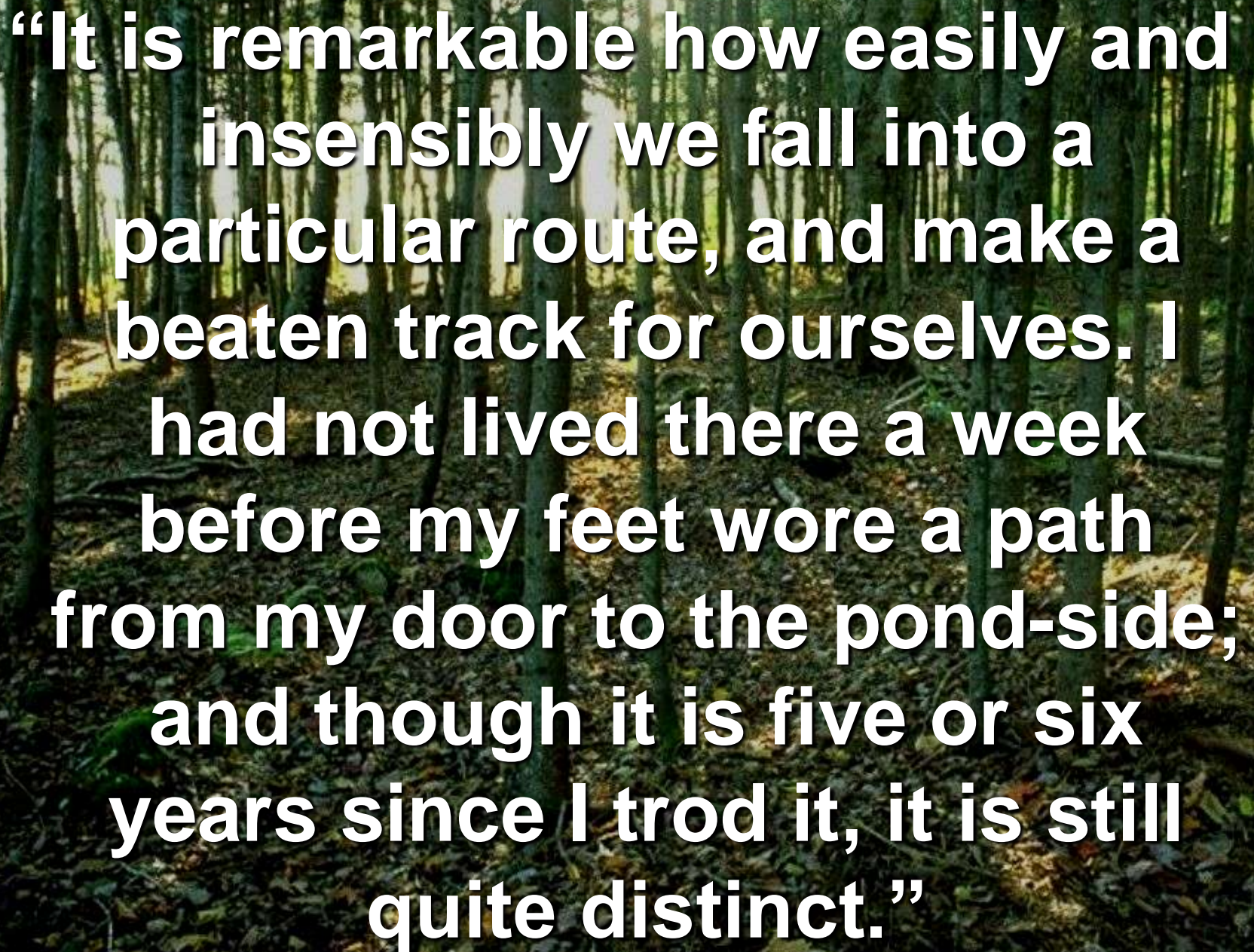




A blue-tinted photograph of a snowy forest. The trees are heavily laden with snow, and the ground is covered in a thick layer of white. The overall scene is serene and wintry. Overlaid on the lower center of the image is a quote in white, bold, sans-serif font.

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



A dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and twigs. The text is overlaid in white, bold font.

**“It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct.”**



“It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity.”



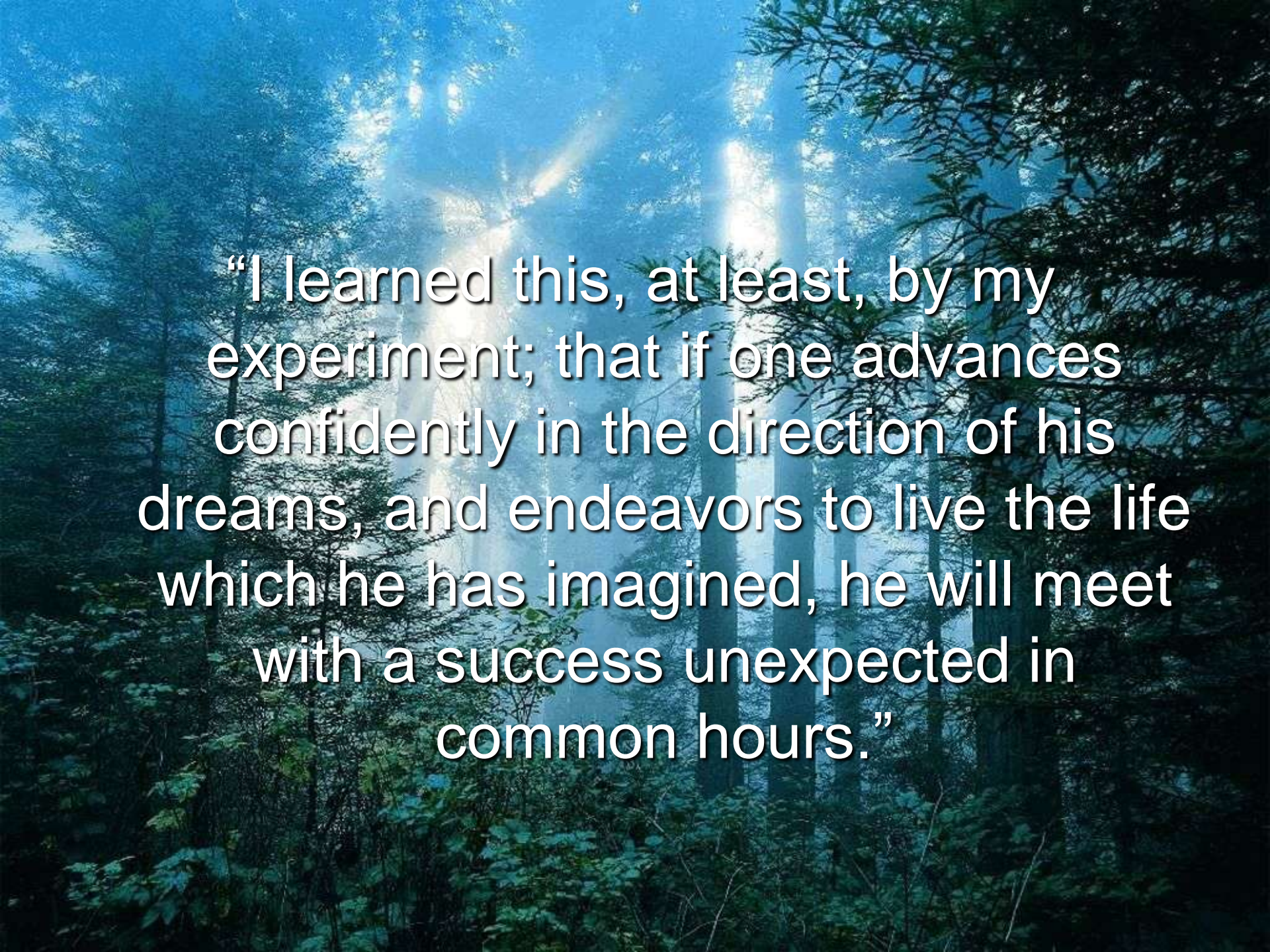




# CONFORMITY

WHEN PEOPLE ARE FREE TO DO AS THEY PLEASE,  
THEY USUALLY IMITATE EACH OTHER.



A photograph of a dense forest with sunlight streaming through the trees, creating a bright, ethereal atmosphere. The light rays are visible, and the overall color palette is dominated by greens and blues.

“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.”



# Cutting a new trail: literally and figuratively

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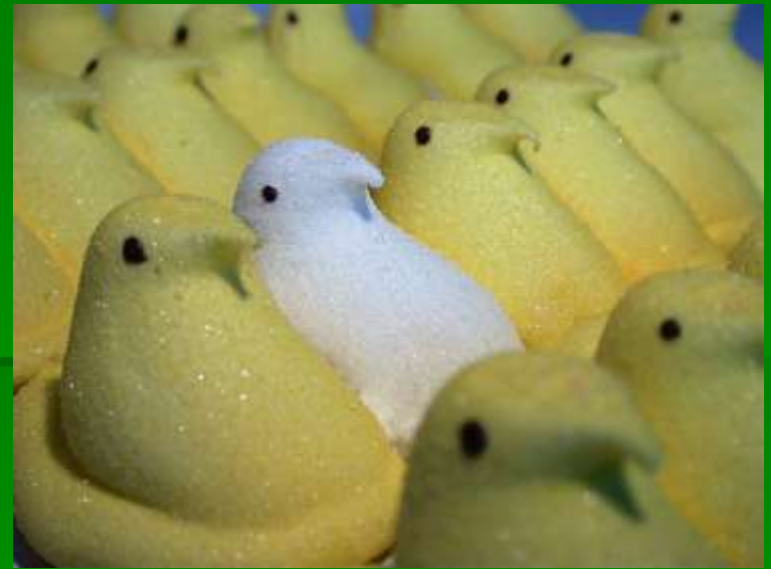
- Difficult
- Frustrating
- Painful
- Exhausting
- Mockery or “misunderstanding”
- Self-doubt: “is this worth it?” “Am I doing the right thing?”

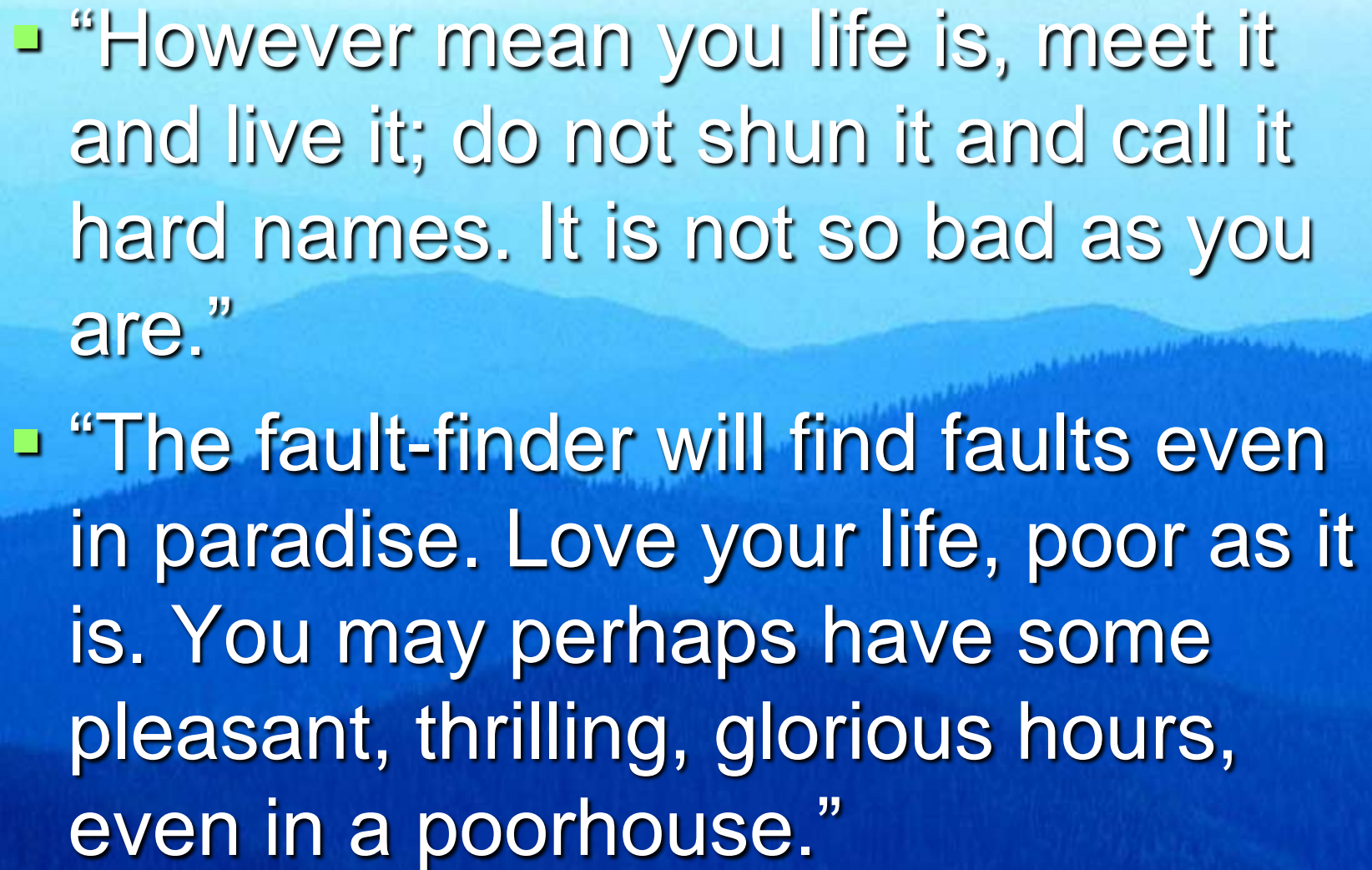
# Requirements

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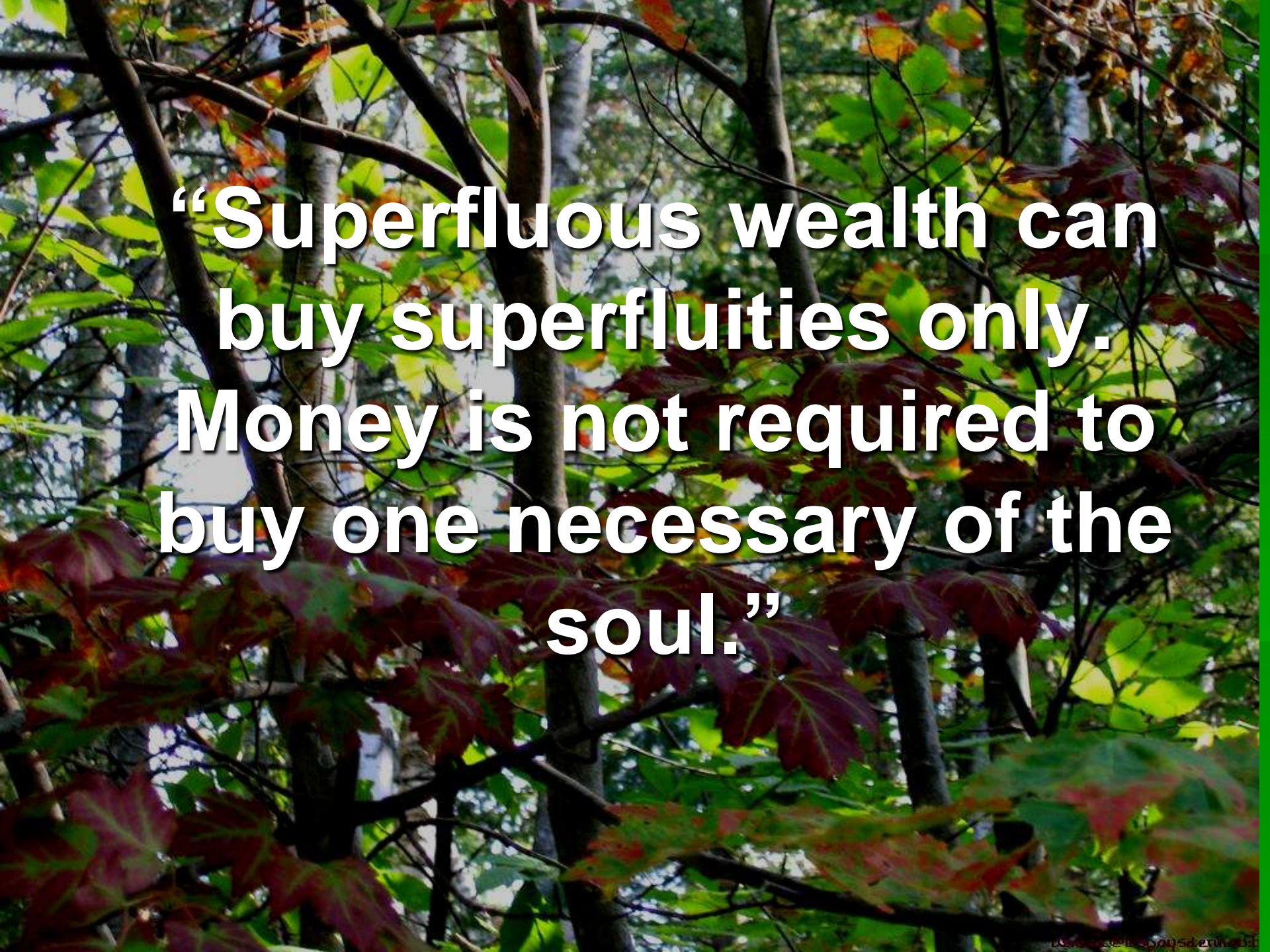
- Preparation
- Courage or fortitude
- Endurance
- Perseverance
- “thick skin”
- Belief in oneself
- Support of others?

“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.”



- 
- “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.”
  - “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.”





**“Superfluous wealth can  
buy superfluities only.  
Money is not required to  
buy one necessary of the  
soul.”**







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# **“Civil Disobedience”**

Henry David Thoreau

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# “Civil Disobedience”

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- Thoreau's essay urging **passive, nonviolent resistance** to governmental policies to which an individual is morally opposed

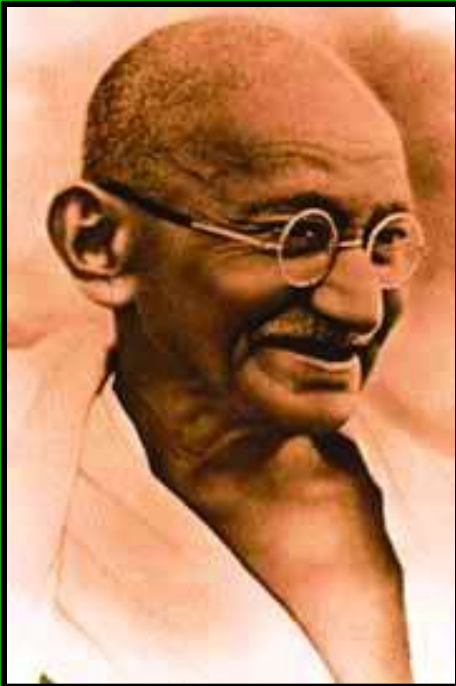
# Civil Disobedience



- Written after Thoreau spent a night in jail after refusing to pay a poll tax.
- Thoreau refused to pay the \$1.50 tax because the revenues went to the government which was allowing slavery to continue and which was waging an unjust war against Mexico.

# “Civil Disobedience”

- Influenced individuals such as Ghandi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. & Cesar Chavez



Click on photo for  
info about each  
person

# Tiananmen Square, China

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1989

For More Info Click: [FRONTLINE: the tank man | PBS](#)



# “Civil Disobedience”

- “That government is best which governs least...That government is best which governs not at all.”
- “I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government.”
- “I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave’s* government also.”



**“If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government let it go...but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.”**



Click on the photo for more information.

# Transcendental Chili Peppers

Sweetheart is bleeding in the snow cone  
So smart she's leading me to ozone  
Music the great communicator  
Use two sticks to make it in the nature  
I'll get you into penetration  
The gender of a generation  
The birth of every other nation  
Worth your weight the gold of meditation  
This chapter's going to be a close one  
Smoke rings I know your going to blow one  
All on a spaceship persevering  
Use my hands for everything but steering  
Can't stop the spirits when they need you  
Mop tops are happy when they feed you  
**J. Butterfly is in the treetop**  
Birds that blow the meaning into bebop



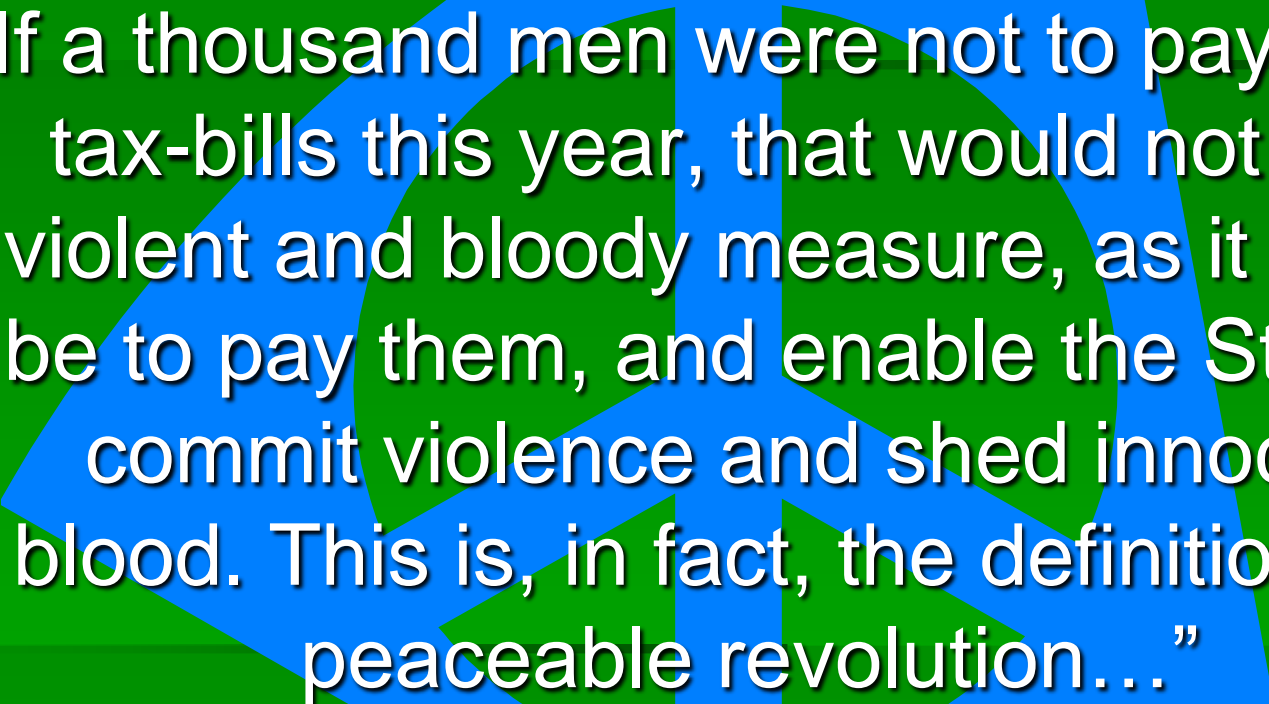
ALLUSION!







“Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison...It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of the race should find them..”



“If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution...”



# Other Thoreau Quotations

- “Things do not change; we change.”
- “The only danger in Friendship is that it will end.”
- “The best way to correct a mistake is to make it right.”
- “When I *hear* music I fear no danger, I am invulnerable, I see no foe. I am related to the earliest times and to the latest.”



Unbeknown to others, Thoreau would sometimes, in the middle of the night, sneak out for a few odds and ends.