



## Walden and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience

*Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862)*

Read by:	Gord Mackenzie	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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When Henry David Thoreau, transcendentalist and friend of Emerson, retreated to Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, he stripped himself of every unnecessary object and distraction and chose to live deliberately. He sought to examine the nature of Life itself, something so dear, precious, imminent and yet so often elusive to so many.

There may be no time more in need of the teachings of Thoreau's *Walden* than today. In the age of instant information and big data we are bombarded with enormous amounts of facts, figures and stories from every corner of the world, both pertinent and superfluous, and left to our own devices to process the information. We become so tied to our screens and so enmeshed in the

flow that we risk mistaking the virtual for the real. And our lives remain stubbornly, undeniably real, however we may wish to represent them virtually. Thoreau would counsel a pause and advise a closer examination, never blinking at the sacrifices necessary, never blinking in the face of Life itself, and never confusing the atoms of data or the molecules of information for the elements of knowledge and wisdom. *(Summary by Michael Hogan)*

**Henry David Thoreau** (July 12, 1817 – May 6, 1862) is best known as the author of *Walden* and the essay *Civil Disobedience*. He was born into a freethinking but poor family in Concord, Massachusetts engaged in the pencil-making business. He attended Concord Academy and Harvard College, graduating in 1837, returning to Concord to work in the family business and found a progressive school, among other endeavors. He became friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson, already a prominent philosopher, essayist and poet who had settled in Concord. Emerson was the figurehead of the Transcendentalist movement, which emphasized the individual soul, personal truth and self-reliance, and correspondingly discounted the value of social norms and traditions. Thoreau's irreverent views were encouraged by the followers and he found modest success publishing nature writings and book reviews in the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*. In 1845 he built a cabin on Walden Pond and set out on a "personal experiment" to contemplate nature and human nature in relative isolation for two years, famously documented in *Walden*. He lived off and on as a pensioner at the Emerson's residence, but returned to the family home and business in the 1850's after the friendship with Emerson cooled. He took on an active role in abolitionist movement in the 1850's before contracting tuberculosis, which felled him at age forty-four.