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„Thoreau and the Hindoo Scriptures: Walden – Life Without Delusion“

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This Master’s Thesis was greatly inspired by my love for India and its philosophies as well as English literature. It has always been my wish to combine these two passions, and in Thoreau I found a very suitable author to help me put this wish into practice.

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1. Introduction - Thoreau and the Hindu Philosophies

An astute reader of Thoreau’s work *Walden; or, Life In The Woods* will soon notice that the author’s writing is deeply influenced by the orient. There is an ongoing debate as to what extent this influence can be proved and to what ends Thoreau and his Concord fellow writers wrote their philosophical treatises (see Christy 3). Emerson, Alcott and Thoreau all read the Hindu Scriptures, at that time including Hindu and Buddhist works, and then incorporated passages into their own writings as a result of adopting those new thoughts as their very own. Whereas Holmes claims that Thoreau took over ideas, a more recent critic states that Thoreau did not take thoughts from the Hindu scriptures, but only figures and sentences, and that he was only interested in the literature itself (see Christy 5). Thoreau himself wrote that he did not care where he got his ideas from, when talking about the *Vedas*, which suggests that he did appropriate ideas from the Hindu scriptures (see Christy 6). If the Concord men had really only been interested in the beauty of the poetic language of those Scriptures, Thoreau would not have stated that he prefers the scriptures of the Indian and oriental nations because they have so much real life and thought in them. He also adds that he knows more about the Hindu, Chinese and Persian Scriptures than about the Hebrew Scriptures (see Christy 9). Cabot writes that Thoreau read many Sanskrit texts in French or Latin translation (see Christy 10).

In the January version of *The Dial* of 1843 Thoreau translated a few passages of the *Laws of Manu*, in which the resignation of pleasure is seen as far better than its attainment. The only way to achieve this goal of avoiding the desire to sense pleasure is by “constant pursuit of divine knowledge and true devotion” (Christy 12). The passages chosen by Thoreau give a clear hint at which thoughts he is drawn to and at the same time prove that not only the beauty of the language, but also the teachings of these Scriptures were of great importance to Thoreau.

Reading *Walden* one soon realizes that Thoreau has set a goal for himself, he wants to make an experiment, live like a yogi, walk the yogic path, which includes seclusion, simple living, detachment, reading of the scriptures, meditation, purification of body and mind, concentration, truthfulness, and ahimsa. (Kumar 392) The task of this thesis will be to show that Thoreau succeeded in this experiment and that he can be assumed a yogi, somebody who has reconnected with his inner voice and purified his mind and thoughts. A man who is content in himself and lives according to his own nature.
2. Thoreau, A Biography

Henry David Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817 in a farmhouse in Massachusetts, close to Concord. His father, John Thoreau, was of French Protestant origin and his mother, Cynthia Dunbar, had four children all together. Henry learned to live with little from childhood on, as the family always struggled to make their living. His mother however, a very kind hearted person, still tried to keep her family happy and help those even more in need. She was a tough woman, known for honestly speaking her mind on political and social issues, she also supported the antislavery movement and gave shelter to many slaves. His parents loved nature and went for long walks whenever they had time. All these influences might have had an impression on Thoreau’s further life and writing, and might have set the prerequisites for his love for nature and truth (see Meltzer 10-12).

In 1828 Henry and his brother were sent to Concord Academy to get the best possible education. Already in school Thoreau was not so much interested in socializing, his intention was drawn to the river and nature, very early he started to watch and learn about it. He was taught poetry and prose in the ancient languages, Greek and Latin and French was also part of his education. In 1822 he built his first boat and discovered Concord River and Walden Pond, and that summer he went to Cambridge to start college there. He soon noticed the danger of adapting to other people’s expectancies, rather than fulfilling one’s individual wishes. While Thoreau was studying at Harvard he fell sick several times, and fortunately recovered each time, and finally in August of 1837 he graduated. After graduation Thoreau started to teach in his former grammar school in Concord, but soon gave up.

Thoreau met Emerson in 1837 and they soon became close friends, Thoreau had already read Emerson’s book, *Nature*, at Harvard and was impressed by his thoughts that nature and the self can and should be studied at the same time. Emerson is called the leader of the transcendentalist movement, who stated that every individual possesses knowledge, much higher than gained by the senses, an inner light and voice, which came from God (see Meltzer 31). From 1837 onwards Thoreau started to write journals which were published after his death. In the fall of 1838 he and his brother John opened up a private school where physical punishment was out of the question and the students learnt by doing. Unfortunately the school had to be closed after his brother died in 1842.
3. A Survey of India’s Philosophies

India’s philosophies can be traced back to the Pre-Aryan heritage. In ancient times the indigenous people of India struggled for their existence and they were overwhelmed by the powers of nature and therefore deified the mystic forces of nature. As they wanted to earn the good-will of those spirits they invented dances, songs and rituals. There were also spirits that were considered evil, so called demons, who liked blood sacrifices (see Kumar 6).

India’s philosophies have different branches, some emphasize the spiritual life, while others emphasize the material and rational (see Kumar 8). Materialists claim that there is no God and if there is one then it is matter, as everything comes from it and everything merges into it again (see Kumar 9). This view conflicts with the teachings of the Vedas and Brahmanas. Again the Upanishads criticize the Vedas, as they disapprove of priesthood and the sacrificial rites that are claimed to lead to salvation (see Kumar 10).

The central focus of all Indian philosophies is man, his suffering, his origin, nature and the meaning of his existence. Philosophy was an intense search for meaning and, according to the philosophers the interpretations differ. Sankara claims the human self to be an aspect of Brahma, whereas Charvaka states that there is no self at all and Samkhya, on the other hand, thinks that the self is an independent entity (see Kumar 15).

3.1. The Philosophy of The Vedas

The Vedas are the earliest philosophical and religious scriptures of the Aryans. In those scriptures elements and events of nature are personified, as one believed that they were caused by a superior power. In order to avoid troubles the Vedas offer chants and rituals to worship the powers of nature (see Kumar 19). The knowledge of the Vedas and the correct performance of the rituals were seen as the most important elements in overcoming human limitations. Although the Vedas deified the powers of nature they also carried the concept of one God who is in control of these powers and through whom meaning and existence can be found:
“In the beginning there arose Hiranya-garbha (the golden child): as soon as born, he alone was the lord of all that is. He established the earth and this heaven: Who is the god to whom we shall offer sacrifice?”

The Vedic sacrifices and rituals are symbols of inner experiences and the gods represent aspects of yogic experience, social customs and conventions, and psychological processes (see Kumar 26, 27). It is important to read the Vedas symbolically otherwise they seem absurd, as all the external meanings stand for inner meanings. For example, if one reads about cow-killing this actually means the purification of breath, and spirit, similarly man-killing stands for the deifying of our minds and intellect (see Kumar 28, 29).

The Vedic view of man sees him as a being possessed of a body, which relates him to nature, manas (mind) was claimed to be the seat of emotions and thought and that it was situated in the heart. Their only notion of good and evil is reflected in the law of Karma, which they believed judged a man after death and according to his deeds, he was either born again, or if having achieved perfection escaped from the wheel of birth (see Kumar 31). It was believed that each soul had a life before and that suffering arises from past actions. Therefore man had two duties, firstly Jnana Kanda, which means meditation and prayers according to one’s personality and secondly Karma Kanda, which deals with purifying the self in order to acquire right knowledge, it also contains diets, penitence, gentle thoughts and gives advice as to what should be avoided (see Kumar 32).

The idea of hierarchy was born in the Vedic days, as some activities were seen as being more important and the priests came to be seen as superior. At a later stage of the Vedic period gradually a caste system, which divided society into four groups, arose: the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. Slowly that system became rigid and hereditary and there was no possibility to cross from one to another (see Kumar 34, 35).

The collections of prayers and chants dedicated to the forces of nature were well known to Thoreau and the Concord men who studied the literature thoroughly (see Christy 14).

The Brahman priests developed a cult of sacrifice which over time became more important than anything else. It was of great importance to hold the right ritual at the right time and a Hotar was needed to recite the hymns, an Udgatar to accompany the ritual with songs and, finally, the Brahman to protect the sacrifice from any harm. It was believed that the smallest mistake in the ritual could bring great harm and, therefore, it

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was the duty of the priest to watch everything carefully, sitting in the south, the haunt of the gods, and pronounce holy words to prevent any harm. The priest had to know the exact details of every ritual in order to discover irregularities and therefore must have studied the full *Vedas*, which can be translated as knowledge (see Christy 17).

**Conception of the World**

On the one hand, *the Vedas* talk about the world in terms of a creation by *Prajapati*, but sometimes they state that the world came into existence out of *Prajapati*. It was believed that everything contained divine life and the world was considered to be real (see Kumar 35). In the beginning it is said there was the one, there was neither being nor non-being, out of this one evolved the gods and the world by breath and heat and the reason for this creation was desire (see Kumar 36).

### 3.2. The Upanishads

Indian philosophy is known for its probing into reality, which did not end with the *Vedas*. *Brahmans* obviously never questioned the idea of sacrificing and the pantheon, but there were many people who were sceptical and, therefore, continued the search. *The Mahabharata* and *the Ramayana* report about ascetics who went to the forest to find peace and slowly those thoughts were put together in *the Upanishads*, which literally means “to sit down near a teacher” (Christy 19). *The Upanishads* are also called *Vedanta* as they mark the end of *the Vedas* and are an interpretation of them. *The Upanishads* are the teachings of several people who used metaphors, allegories and symbols in order to convey their deep spiritual experiences (see Kumar 38). The name *Upanishads* means sitting devoutly, as at those times they were secret teachings only given to a pupil by a teacher. *The Upanishads* criticize the outward, ritualistic worship of *the Vedas* and emphasize true inwardness (see Kumar 40).

In the Upanishadic times, from around 700 BCE onwards, there was no interest in knowledge itself, one rather distinguished between two forms of experience, the outer physical experience and the inner experience which leads to self-realisation, and a higher and a lower awareness (see Kumar 41).

> “Two knowledges must be known – so say the knowers of Brahman – the higher and the lower. [...] but the higher is that by which the imperishable (aksara) is understood.”

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The lower knowledge involves physical things, experiences as well as feelings and emotions and mental states. The higher knowledge is not concerned with particular things it can only be attained by a higher state of being and sees the things as they really are (see Kumar 41, 42). It is interesting to note that the Upanishads do emphasize the importance of knowledge, but they clearly state that it is not the only way to self-awareness. It needs to be supported by right action, called karma, and right living, and one also needs to gain control over one’s senses (see Kumar 64).

According to the Upanishads, Brahman is the ultimate reality, everything comes from Brahman and everything goes back to it, it is the sustenance and source of the world and everything is Brahman (see Kumar 42, 43). In the Upanishads the Atman (i.e. the individual soul) and Brahman are one, as everything emerged from Brahman and Brahman is true, everything else must be true as well. The world in the Upanishads is seen as real and Brahman is the only real thing, so there can be nothing without it that is unreal (see Chakravarti 146).

The Upanishads state that there are numberless manifestations of Reality, but that the ultimate cause of all is the One. Brahman is potentially full of numerous concrete things into which it spreads itself (see Chakravarti 141). Knowledge is complete when everything is traced back to Brahman, Brahman is not unknowable but one can only know it partially as long as one lives in duality. As everyone is a potential Brahman it is only a question of time, when one will become knowledge itself (see Chakravarti 144 and Kumar 54).

Everything comes out of Brahman and finally returns to it, sometimes it is described as light of lights (see Kumar 43). The Upanishads describe Atman and Brahman as one and the same, whereas other different schools differentiate between the Soul and Brahman. The Upanishads tried to bring those teachings together and intellectually merged individuality and the Absolute (see Kumar 45). There are two views of Brahman, the cosmic view, where everything is seen as an expression of Brahman and therefore everything is real and will finally return to Brahman. In this view Brahman is the origin of everything, and at the same time a feeling and caring God, the enjoyer and the enjoyed (see Kumar 49). The acosmic view on the other hand, states that Brahman alone is real and everything else is only appearance, like shadows without any content and Brahman is seen as an impersonal principle, Brahma nirguna. Brahman has not changed into the world but only appears as it. Some Upanishads try to connect those opposite views as for example the Maitrayani Upanishad, where Brahman is linked with Atman, the individual soul, which can enlighten the body and mind and by that can
lead to self-realization. Meaning one realizes that one is the Atman, which again is Brahman, indicating a state of individual enlightenment (see Kumar 51).

Maya in the Upanishads describes the universe as appearance, as unreal, like sparks of fire when rotating fast creates an illusory circle, the universe is just an illusion and what makes the individual believe this is true is called ignorance or avidya, right knowledge therefore implies removing this ignorance (see Kumar 53). Maya is a power used by God to create the world and his different forms, therefore everything, even Maya, is an aspect of Brahman and, therefore, as real as he himself is. The Upanishads distinguish between two forms of the individual self: the biological self, called jiva or self, which is sometimes described as having the size of a grain of rice or a thumb, controls all the involuntary activities of the body. The word jiv means to breathe and therefore jiva is ‘that which breathes’. The non-biological self, purusa, is closely linked to jiva, as jiva is seen as the purusa in the body and continues after death. It is through purusa that one may accumulate karma, which makes it the experiencer and the experienced and a mode of Brahman (see Kumar 54-55). The relation of the self to Brahman differs according to the two views of Brahman: in the cosmic view the individual soul is identical with Brahman and at the same time different, which implies that his expressions in plurality are real. Whereas in the acosmic view the different parts of Brahman are distinguished from each other and the world is an appearance of Brahman. The issue here is the question of how something can be divided and still keep its identity, a question which is not answered in The Upanishads (see Kumar 55).

In many Upanishads however, the plurality of selves is emphasised, everyone is different because of different choices and because of the capacity of reasoning. As the individual does not remember its origin it is ignorant, avidya arises. Each individual gets an awareness of its body, this egocentricity involves also the mind. Out of this attachment to the body and the ignorance about one’s origin evil arises (see Kumar 58). The Upanishads distinguish between five Koshas or sheaths and four different states of consciousness, the waking, the dreaming, the dreamless, and bliss or ananda, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters (see Kumar 57).

The Upanishads describe a path to regain the relationship with Brahman and how to overcome evil. The first stage is brahmacarya, the stage of discipleship. At this stage, the student obeys his teacher and blindly believes him, he trains to listen to and serve his teacher. The following stage is grhasthasrama, the stage of the householder. At this stage one gets married and leads an ethical life as a householder. One is also expected to have a son as future insurance for the family continuity. The next stage is vanaprastha,
the forest dweller. Here one leaves one’s family in order to search for one’s own self, for which solitude is required. One tries to forget all the family ties, one may do this alone or with one’s wife. The last stage is *sanyasa*, the renouncer and wanderer. At this stage one leaves behind all tradition, rites and institutions, also one’s wife. One becomes a wanderer attached to nothing, one only searches for one’s own self.

Living these four stages, however, does not guarantee that one will attain *moksha* (i.e. liberation), but they offer the possibility to learn to distinguish between what is temporary and what endures, it is a path to release from bondage and suffering and, finally, leads to a stage of happiness independent of outer pleasures or pain (see Kumar 59-60). It is the aim of every soul to finally reunite with *Brahman* and, therefore, the ultimate philosophical aim of *The Upanishads* is the discovery of oneself as an aspect of it (see Kumar 57).

### 3.3. The Mahabharata and The Bhagavad Gita (c. 1400/1200 B.C.)

The *Gita* was one of the most influential books in Concord, it was spoken of frequently and Emerson’s library, which contained one of the few English translations, was visited often. Thoreau would take the *Gita* to Walden Pond and write several passages about it, praising its value.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of *the Mahabharata*, the original form probably written between 1400 or 1200 B.C., but the now popular version dates from around 500 B.C. The *Gita* has eighteen chapters and contains seven hundred verses. After a long fight between the Kurs and the Pandavas and an exile, Arjuna and his army wanted to get back their land and had to fight their relatives. Arjuna hesitated and asked *Krishna* (i.e.) for advice, he did not see any sense in killing his family, but *Krishna* encouraged him to fight. Souls do not have a beginning nor an end, how could Arjuna have been the reason for any pain? Krishna told Arjuna that he has to do his duty and fight in order to gain the joys of this world.

One cannot be without action, even Brahma is action, the only thing one can do is to let go of the fruits of action and have a quiet mind while acting. There are different ways of finding liberation, one is that of sacrifice and exercise, an other is that of devotion, and the third, the road of knowledge is the highest in Krishna’s view. Krishna does not deny the possibility of fleeing from the world of duties, but he presents a new and better way in dealing with life’s difficulties. He offers a way to
perform one’s duties with a detached mind, Arjuna was a warrior and, therefore, his
duty was to fight, if Arjuna fights without clinging to the fruit of this action, this is
much better than refusing action at all (see Christy 26-28). One should act according to
one’s nature, in doing so one acts in conformity with God and keeps society intact. Only
by acting according to one’s inwardness one will keep balance and avoid conflict. The
ideal way of acting is with self-control and discipline, which again keeps balance
between action and inaction. If there is no individuality to any person or action then
everything is done by God to God and there is no responsibility for the individual; a
wise yogi knows this and acts according to this knowledge (see Kumar 87).

The Gita presents a personal God, Krishna, who wants to be loved and worshipped,
but it also includes the concept of Brahma of the Upanishads as the pantheistic All,
which is often claimed to be inconsistent (see Christy 28). Bhakti and action are merged
in the Gita, knowledge, action and devotion are brought together and create a state of
being where the spiritual is superior to the biological. Another important message is that
one needs to fulfil one’s duties without desire for reward. Although the biological needs
are recognised in the Gita, it states that once a person has attained true individuality, the
biological needs are transformed and the state of self-transcendence is so pleasing in
itself that one will no longer feel the need for other rewards. One is no longer affected
by biological needs if one is detached from them (see Kumar 81). In the Gita God is
both personal and impersonal and the soul is indestructible, as it is neither born, nor can
it die. The soul is infinite and causes all infinity to be, the body is seen only as ‘a
garment’ that is changed in different lives.

The Gita emphasises knowledge as an inevitable requisite in order to gain self-
realisation, as it helps one to become detached from sensory impulses (see Kumar 83).
The Gita has become such a famous and often read scripture because it offers many
roads to the one goal, and all those roads are seen as equal and are chosen according to
the personality of the disciple. The Gita is eclectic and was particularly influential on
the Concordians, as it posed the same questions as the other scriptures and gave similar
answers, as Emerson stated (see Christy 29). Its emphasis on bhakti (i.e. love and
devotion) and its approval of life in all its facets especially impressed Thoreau (see
Christy 29).

The first translation of the Bhagavad Gita was made by Charles Wilkins, the first
Englishman who knew Sanskrit, it was published in 1785. Wilkins also translated the
Hitopadesa, a collection of moral fables, and parts of the Mahabharata and one can
assume that all these translations were read in Concord (see Christy 40). What makes
the epics so fascinating is probably their attempt to synthesise and unite many different and at times conflicting ideas, which might have been one fact that drew the Concordian’s attention to those scriptures.

### 3.4. The Puranas

*The Puranas*, meaning old stories, are among the most important books of Hinduism and they were written between 400 and 1000 B.C. based on ideas of older texts. There are 18 main Puranas, which can be divided into 3 groups, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva Purana. *The Puranas* are seen as a revelation of the gods and were written for the purpose of worshipping specific deities, describing ceremonies and feasts (vrata). Some chapters give legal information and instruction on the rights and duties of the castes, the four stages of life, sacrifices for the dead and other spiritual advice.³

Horace Hayman Wilson translated *the Puranas* into English and selected the Vishnu Purana for publication, which soon later made its way to Concord. Wilson also translated *the Rigveda* and wrote a critical review on Max Müller’s work (see Christy 41).

3.5 The Laws of Manu

The Manusmriti belongs to the texts of the Dharmashastras and is a smriti, a text passed on by teachers. It is believed to have emerged between 200 BC and 200 AD and consists of 2,685 verses (The Laws of Manu xvi). The Manusmriti is less a legal than a normative text, which discusses the duties to be fulfilled in the four stages of life, the Brahmacharin (disciple), Grihastha (housekeeper), Vanaprastha (the one who seeks solitude in the woods) and the Samnyasin (the one who abandons the world). A better translation would have been ‘the teachings’ of Manu, for it is a book of philosophy. Although the text is a compilation of sayings by different authors, it is attributed to Manu, which is both the name of a king, and a term meaning ‘the wise one’ or ‘human’, therefore represents the human race itself (see The Laws of Manu xviii).

The Laws of Manu give details about the sacraments (samskaras), the studies of the Vedas, the wedding and daily ceremonies, it also informs about forbidden meals, ritual purity and the king’s duties. The text begins with the creation of the world and ends with mentioning the consequences of good and evil deeds for the future life.4

The text represents life as it is and as it should be and has been a very influential book on the Hindu religion and Hindu family life (see The Laws of Manu xvii).

The Laws of Manu was one of the first books translated into English, with its earliest translation done by Sir William Jones in Calcutta in 1794 it was included in the Sacred Books of the East series edited by Max Müller (see The Laws of Manu xix).

4 http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manusmriti,
4. Living In Delusion

Thoreau starts *Walden* with the chapter ‘Economy’ in which he explains his plans for his near future. Thoreau states that he will only talk about himself in the following book because he can only give an account of his own experience and that he will not write about anything he has just heard from someone else (see Thoreau 1).

Thoreau emphasizes the importance of personal experience, and he clearly states that something only learned by hearsay is of no value. In the first lines of Walden he makes a point crucial to Indian philosophy and, especially, to the philosophy of Yoga, namely that reading or listening alone does not lead to the goal, only personal experience does. It is also stated that age does not make a person wise in itself, and that he did not get any good advice from his fellow men, as their experiences had been so restricted. Thoreau believes that old ways of thinking or doing things are not to be trusted just because they have a long tradition, they always need to be questioned and might turn out to be false after all (see Thoreau 5). It is part of delusion to believe that age and traditions are always trustworthy, sometimes they only keep people stuck in what they have been doing for a long time and do not direct to something new. People tend not to think themselves but to take over patterns of thought from one generation to another, without questioning them, which keeps them in a state of delusion.

Thoreau criticises the way people enslave themselves with their big houses, their jobs and all the unnecessary, luxurious things they believe are needed. He even compares those people with Brahmins chained to a tree, or, Hercules and his twelve labours, which he states are not to be compared, as they were limited to twelve and had an end, whereas the torture of the people does not. The immortal souls of those people are crushed under the heavy weight of their life (see Thoreau 2). “But man labor under a mistake” (Thoreau 3). They pile up treasures that will be worthless in the end and by all that forget to do the important work, a work that brings up the finer fruits of life. By acting like a machine people do not have time to remember their ignorance, which would be necessary to allow the finest qualities of their nature to grow. Those qualities would need tender hands to be preserved, but Thoreau claims that we do not treat one another tenderly, not even ourselves (see Thoreau 3).

People are not only the slaves of their properties, but more so they are slaves of their opinions about themselves. Public opinion creates fears in people and everyone tries hard to meet the expectations of society, but even more so people are prisoners of their own opinions, which determine their fate. People do not think of themselves as divine
and immortal, more common is a feeling of anxiety and strain, which is an incurable disease (see Thoreau 6). Behaving well and fit for society makes people despair but that feeling stays unconscious and is even concealed by amusements of all kinds. For Thoreau it would be wise not to do desperate things and he states that even though people might think there is no other choice possible, still there is. People did not choose this way of living because it is the only possibility, but because they preferred it, and there is always a way to change, “[...] nature and human life are various.” (Thoreau 6). In the *Mahabharata* the Pandawas were condemned to wander in the wilderness for 12 years and in the 13th year they were supposed to stay hidden, before they were allowed to come back to their kingdom again. Thoreau’s society can be compared with the 13th year of the Pandavas, materialism seems triumphant, and there seems no other way, the existence of the soul is a matter of doubt and people do not live by faith (see Sri Krishna Prem 16).

Thoreau sees that the people are so used to their way of life, which has its roots in desire that they cannot imagine anything else, their soul has not learned yet that no outer gains can bring it joy and peace, only God can (see Sri Krishna Prem 31). When Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* claims that he sees no good in killing his kinsmen, this refers exactly to the situation Thoreau finds his fellowmen in, those kinsmen stand for social pressure, the family and oneself. For these kinsmen, possession of material wealth and good dress gain a person respect, and it is not important what kind of person one is, the outside appearance counts more than the spiritual and moral values. Thoreau goes so far as to say that a well dressed scarecrow is more respected than a man wearing weather-beaten clothes. People are concerned more about their fashion than they are about their conscience (see Thoreau 13, 14). There is an outward tendency to be noticed, which is called *asuric* in Indian philosophy, it is a tendency that draws the soul ever more deeply into matter. This *asuric* tendency, also called *pravritti*, is represented by the Kauravas, Arjuna’s cousins, against who he stands on the field to lead battle (see Sri Krishna Prem 19). Just as Arjuna doubts his mission to kill his family and friends the people in Walden decide not to fight their enemies, they might even be in a state where they have not realized them as their enemies yet. Eventually, however, according to Indian philosophy desire leads to bondage and bondage leads to sorrow and unhappiness and this can be the starting point to the upward movement. The bright or *daivic* movement, *nivritti*, is the tendency which leads the soul on its journey back to Spirit (see Sri Krishna Prem 19, 199).
Thoreau warns against new clothes worn by the same old person, because as long as the personality does not change new clothes will not make a better person, just as it does not make sense to fill new wine in old bottles. A snake and a caterpillar leave their skin behind once they have grown out of it, they have been transformed and take on a new skin, the same should happen with people (see Thoreau 15). Thoreau compares our garments with false skins under which we hide. The Indian philosophy also talks about layers that cover our true self and that need to be stripped off in order to be freed from delusion.

Human consciousness consists of five layers, or sheaths, called koshas folded around the central point which is the self or chitta. The second kosa is bliss (Anandamayi Kosha) and both layers are always there covered by the other koshas. The self is the only truth and like a screen it never gets touched by what happens in life, it is the self of which Krishna is talking in the Bhagavad Gita when he states “Indestructible is the presence that pervades all this; no one can destroy this unchanging reality” (Miller, BG 2.17). “It is called unmanifest, inconceivable, and immutable;” (Miller, BG 2.25). The self reflects what happens, but never can be touched by it, hurt, or killed.5

Around the kosa of bliss one finds the sheath of knowledge (Vigyanamayi Kosha) combining ego and intellect, whereby ego links all events in life together. Ego arises out of the illusion that one is a separate being, which makes one believe to be responsible for the body and everything that goes with it, ego fears death and illness. The ego increases by struggle and attachment and, therefore, being detached is a major goal of Indian philosophy. Intellect collects all the information you encountered in this and in past lives, it makes up your beliefs about race, family and everything you believe to be.

The next layer is mind (Manomayi Kosha) by which we perceive and process the world, mind uses the brain as a tool to process all the information gathered through the sense organs. Mind is present everywhere and together with intelligence

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5 http://www.sanatansociety.org/yoga_and_meditation/five_koshas_yoga.htm.
and ego it travels from one body to another in the course of reincarnation.

The moving force prana or vital air (Pranamayi Kosha) supplies the whole system with energy and thereby keeps it alive. Prana does not only refer to oxygen but to the vital force, the energy which is needed in order to keep the system working, it creates vibration, pulsation and is connected with mind. If one is in control over one’s breath and vital forces one can master and clear the mind, which stops internal dialogues.

The last kosha (Annamayi Kosha) is the material layer (see Kumar 56); it originates from the cerebrospinal system, which is the first part to be developed after conception, a constant flow of energy through the nervous system supplies the material body. Mind controls the brain and brain again makes the whole body work in concord. 6

When Thoreau writes of well-dressed scarecrows being paid more respect than simple-clothed people he obviously refers to these layers, he criticizes the superficiality of his society and even mocks the dressed up by comparing them to a hollow scarecrow, which looks nice to the outside but being nothing underneath. The outer sheaths of intelligence and body are what most people care for, their daily business to get food and shelter is important to them, but they forget to nurture their souls and humanity.

One might compare the shirt Thoreau praises and claims to be something universal “I believe that all races at some seasons wear something equivalent to the shirt.” (Thoreau 15) to the soul as the inner layer, as usually it is worn underneath other clothes and it is as much out of fashion as the search for the soul is. Nevertheless Thoreau believes it to be something all races have in common, and all races at some point find their way to their soul and then they can “[...] like the old philosopher, walk out the gate empty-handed without anxiety.” (Thoreau 15).

The owners of the factories who produce the clothes are the only ones to profit from the seasonal changes of fashion and get rich, while the customers, in the long run, will not have more than a pile of unfashionable clothes, unless they aim for something higher than outward beauty (see Thoreau 17).

Thoreau calls the desire for new patterns and forms of clothes ‘savage’ as he realizes that it is driven by the outward forces of desire. As desire can never be fulfilled and will always want for more, he observes that sewing is an endless work, there will always come new tastes and new patterns and, therefore, the clothes of a person are never finished (see Thoreau 14). Desire is never fulfilled it can only be stopped by detachment and renouncement. Furthermore, it is stated that worshipping God is not dependent on outer appearance, but more so on inner purity, which cannot be disguised by dressing

6 http://www.sanatansociety.org/yoga_and_meditation/five_koshas_yoga.htm
nicely (see Thoreau 14). As shown in the *koshas* Thoreau also claims that all clothes can be stripped off without injuring the person, as they are just the outer layers and have nothing to do with the real self of the person (see Thoreau 15). On the other hand he notices that people identify with their clothes more and more everyday which makes it difficult to put them aside, as they become part of the person’s character, in some way they make the person (see Thoreau 13). Just like the *koshas* people’s clothes become an object of identification and, according to Thoreau, must be stripped off. Mankind is so full of ideas and concepts that for Thoreau the only way to a new way of thinking is putting men into a press and squeezing everything out, but even then one would have to be aware of the fact that some old notions would survive and grow again (see Thoreau 16). Thoreau compares those notions with maggots that are not even killed in fire, a common symbol for purification in Indian thought. Thoreau obviously knows that the path to truth is a long and difficult one and will bring about many retrograde steps, one has to free one’s character from all preconceptions and attachments, they need to be burned in fire and whenever one of those maggots tries to hatch one needs to divest oneself of it (see Thoreau 16). Thoreau claims the same to be true for shelter, but he admits it is a necessity in his region but in the same sentence he gives examples of peoples only possessing skin bags and tents living in even colder regions. For Thoreau a house should only be shelter from rain, storm and cold winters, a safe place to sleep but soon man not only craved for physical warmth but also affection and this is what a home represents (see Thoreau 17). Thoreau observes that we still have that primitive yearning of searching for caves and being outside in us when children, but society has advanced and changed caves for roofs, fresh air for domestic life. People have made their lives small and domestic, they do not long for anything higher, they have lost touch with the infinity of the stars and with their own infinity and joy. “Birds do not sing in caves” (Thoreau 18). Later he explains how much it pleases him to dig out his cellar in search for a room with equal temperature and calls the house a porch to the entrance of a cave (see Thoreau 29).

Being free in one’s soul is more desirable than owing a big house, which is more a prison to the owner than anything else, as most people cannot afford to own the houses they live in (see Thoreau 19). Thoreau states that the savage own their shelters because they do not cost so much, whereas the civilized can not afford the farms and conveniences of their house. For Thoreau the life which is required to pay for all the advantages of civilization is too much for the outcome it produces, he calculates that the average person needs 15 to 20 years to own his home (see Thoreau 19). Thoreau does
not reject the benefits of civilization in which the individual is mostly absorbed for the benefit of society, but he believes that the disadvantages that go along with it are too many (see Thoreau 20). Comfort and independence are a trap in which men get caught, but do not realize it. Men think they are civilized and rich, whereas in reality they are poor compared to the savage, who owns his shelter and his soul. Men sacrifice heavenly comforts for earthly greatness (see Thoreau 21). Thoreau believes that palaces should accommodate noblemen and that as long as men are only worried about gross comforts and necessaries they should not live better than savages. Beautiful and big buildings do not make people nobler, the outer layer does not change the inside of the person. Whereas one class rises much higher than the savage, another class sinks even lower, as the luxury of the one class can only be compensated by the poverty of another (see Thoreau 22). Thoreau names the workers that live in cold shanties, the Irish and the labourers of the South, who are poorer than the savages and whose physical condition is much worse than that of North American Indians, in order to point out the neglect that consists within civilization (see Thoreau 22).

When a man still lived simple and naked in primitive ages he felt like a guest in nature, he lived in the world in a tent and went wherever it pleased him, he plucked fruits when he was hungry, but nowadays he is a farmer and housekeeper. “Men have become the tools of their tools” (Thoreau 24). What once was there to serve man, now keeps him imprisoned. Thoreau states that people do not put up their tents on earth for a night anymore and then wander on, much more they have domiciled themselves on earth and forgotten heaven (see Thoreau 24). Thoreau states that good art expresses man’s struggle to free himself, that the effect of it is that people forget the higher state and feel themselves comfortable in this condition, though. Sense of beauty can best be learned in nature and before man fills his house with beautiful objects he should empty his life and house and re-fill it with a beautiful way of life (see Thoreau 24). There is no use in putting the cart before the horse, in the Bhagavad Gita the chariot stands for the mind which needs to hold back the senses represented by the horse (see Sri Krishna Prem 43). As stated in The Upanishads:

Know the self as a chariot-owner, the body as a chariot, the intelligence (buddhi) as a charioteer, the mind (manas) as the reins. The senses of the one without understanding, with mind ever undisciplined, are out of control, like evil horses of a charioteer. (Katha III, 3&5)

The horse, the chariot and the charioteer have their position and each needs to know where it stands, Thoreau, as well as the Hindu scriptures, does not mean that comfort and progress is bad altogether, but that man should not be controlled by them. As long
as man cuts his spiritual bread thinner than his forefathers cut their wheaten bread, his house should first be lined with beauty where it comes in contact with his life. Thoreau compares a house to a shell, which is more beautiful inside than outside, and he thinks houses should be built and decorated in this way. A beautiful outside is pointless when the inside is dirty and neglected, the soul like a pearl in a shell needs to be embedded in beautiful living, which is not only turned outward but keeps the inward clean and beautiful (see Thoreau 25). “Do not search for the constant in the inconstant things.” (Katha IV, 2).

But even in delusion the sound of the soul can be heard far away, the bird symbolizing the soul (see Sri Krishna Prem 18) is already singing in the woods even though the water is still covered with ice. Thoreau compares mankind to a snake, lying numb in the water not feeling any inconvenience about it, as much as man does not feel the need to change his condition, but spring will come and the warmth of the sun will wake the snake to new life, just as at some point mankind will feel the need to rise to a higher state (see Thoreau 26). In Yoga the snake is a symbol for the Kundalini energy, which needs to be awakened slowly and pulled up the spine, it is the life force that needs to rise and merge with the spiritual energy. As the snake in Walden the Kundalini is asleep in most people, but when the warmth of the spiritual exercise, the sun, shines on it, it slowly awakes. Before dawn the Soul finds itself in its darkest hour, materialism seems triumphant and the existence of the Soul is a matter of doubt, but the Soul cannot be buried in darkness forever and like spring awakes the snake, the Soul also must awake like a rising star (see Sri Krishna Prem 23). “I am the endless cosmic serpent, the lord of all sea creatures […]” (BG 10.29). The grooping goose flying over the foggy pond symbolizes the Soul lost in the veil of matter (see Thoreau 27). Thoreau and the Hindu scriptures compare mankind to different animals, lost or asleep, who need to be awakened by right knowledge.

Another delusion of men is their longing for news, they want to know what happens in the world around them, for some this longing for news is even an addiction, the first thing they do in the morning is read the news in search for knowledge which according to Thoreau is of no importance. People commiserate with others not realizing that they themselves need to be commiserated. “[…] never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself.” (Thoreau 61). The allusion of the cave was already used in Plato’s cave parable, which clearly describes mankind’s situation. Tied to a life in a dark cave they
believe the shades to be reality and do not believe the one who has managed to get out of the cave and has seen sunlight and the colorful world outside the cave. When he comes back into the cave with the mission to free the others from their miserable life in darkness, they do not believe him and characterize him crazy. (Plato…) People long for news as if this information was of any use, but in reality they fill themselves with useless knowledge as they are not capable of acquiring real knowledge. Thoreau claims that all news is just gossip for a real philosopher, since he is interested in real knowledge (see Thoreau 61).

People only see the shades of reality and do not have the eyes to see the real thing, their eyes are only rudiments, not fit to see crystal clear what is in front of them, the only things they can make out are shapes and rough patterns, believing they are reality. If they only trained their eyes they would realize that it is not the world that exists of rough shapes, but that it was their eyes which were not able to see clear enough.

When Thoreau writes about the sound sleepers, covered with sand on which the rails run smoothly he uses a word pun to illustrate how asleep men are and how they are covered with the sand of progress and run over by its trains. It is also an allusion to society in which the higher class runs over the lower class, but once in a while one of those sleepers gets up and it takes a lot of effort to keep them levelled down (see Thoreau 60). Reality is not comprehended by most people, delusion is taken as truth, daily routines make up people’s lives but they are built on false illusions. Life, if seen without delusion, feels like a fairy tale, but only unhurried and wise people realize that only great and worthy things have permanence and are of an absolute existence. (see Thoreau 62).

Thoreau gives an example from the Akhyayikas where a Bikkhu, a monk, tells the story of a king’s son who was brought up by a forester and believed to belong to his race until it was revealed to him that he was a king’s son and then slowly he began to see himself as a prince. The Bikkhu explains that, “[…] the soul mistakes its own character, until the truth is revealed to it by some holy teacher, and then it knows itself to be Brahme.” (Thoreau 63). Thoreau states that New England lives this life of the lost soul, because people do not see beyond the surface. If one watches anything with the eye of wisdom, one would see the reality behind things, buildings and towns, one would realize that God himself is present in every stone and moment. The divine is not to be searched in some faraway eternity, God is in the present, and no space or time can make him more divine than he is. For Thoreau the only way to comprehend the sublime is by
incessantly absorbing our surroundings, which constantly embodies the truth. One should live deliberately and work one’s way through, “opinions, prejudice, tradition, delusion and appearance, through church and state, poetry, philosophy and religion” (Thoreau 63-64) until we reach the core of reality. There one should put a lamp, a wall or even a gauge, so that in future one can see how deep the layers of all opinion and appearance have gotten and how deep reality has been buried. The waves of delusion have gone high and people have got lost in them. But the only thing man really desires, is the knowledge of truth and therefore Thoreau suggests to look beyond the waves and one will find the ocean of reality (see Thoreau 64).

Time is illusionary, it is a stream in which one goes fishing, it goes by and at the same time is permanent. Thoreau compares time with a sandy river and the river is compared to the sky with its stars at the bottom, he longs to drink deeper, to drink knowledge of reality. The day he was born was wise, the present is always wise as it incorporates all that was, is and will be and Thoreau believes that his intellect is a tool to dig the way to wisdom, which is somewhere close and only needs to be dug free (see Thoreau 64).

The divine is already there underneath the appearances and prejudices it just needs to be dug out. Wisdom and freedom from delusion can only be achieved by letting go all the thick layers of habits and opinions, tradition and beliefs, since only then is one free to see things as they really are and let them effect oneself. Thoreau criticizes that his contemporaries are so degraded that they do not even speak of traits and functions that belong to the human body and he mentions the Laws of Manu, where all that is discussed in detail. Thoreau states that by being discussed those features are elevated. Our body is a temple to the god one worships, everyone has to sculpture their temple and refine ones features. “Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships […]” (Thoreau 144).
5. Realizing The Reality of All Beings – Brahman

5.1 Gaining Immortality

Men are mortal, everything one does will end sooner or later, everyone one knows will die, family, property, nothing lasts forever, but the thirst for truth is eternal and who himself is an observer and student of reality deals with truth and by that becomes immortal. Those sages who lift the veil from reality only a bit contribute a lot to the world, as truth once found is never lost. We were in them and they are in us, when we remember those pieces of truth found out ages ago, as there is no past, present or future in times we really improve. As Thoreau states in chapter 3, in the moments one deals with truth, one is immortal, time dissolves, as it is part of the veil, therefore, once the veil is lifted, and truth can be seen, also past, present and future disappear. (Thoreau 64-65)

In order to lift this veil a focus, a strong longing for truth, is needed, one needs to turn to one’s heart, which is the Soul and be ready for vision and insight (see Sri Krishna Prem 140). In the Gita in song eleven Arjuna strives for knowledge, he wants to see Krishna’s totality. He asks Krishna to show himself if he believes that Arjuna is capable of seeing it. It becomes clear that seeing the divine needs a certain capability and readiness (see BG 11.3-4). Krishna wants Arjuna to see his thousand forms, colours and shapes but he also explains that for this vision he needs a divine eye, one cannot see all this with a human eye (see BG 11.8). In order to see this vision one needs to be a stranger to the illusions of the world and be able to see through them into the divine life beyond (see Sri Krishna Prem 140). This divine eye makes Arjuna, who stands for the disciple, able to see the universe in all its greatness and vastness, it enables vision, insight and wisdom and makes one feel humble in sight of this great creator and destroyer. But it is not only an amazing vision one will have, it is also frightening to see that all forms pass, the self is seized and vanishes in this Void, the lower self, faith and tradition, clinging to matter, everything is impermanent. The only thing that remains is the stream of karma, by which the universe is linked. If the disciple strives for real knowledge, it will soon be clear that everything is swallowed by time, only the soul is permanent. With this insight for the disciple the path, the goal and he himself are the same (see Sri Krishna Prem 144).
The spiritual law that rules the world becomes obvious, there are two streams, one outgoing, creative stream, by which the universe extends and individuals search for self-expression and competition. The second, opposed stream leads homeward, all the fruits of the experiences made are collected here and brought back to Atman, the source of both streams, so knower and known merge and become one. Only with a silent mind can one get close to the Cosmic Treasure House (see Sri Krishna Prem 154-146). The divine eye allows one to see that all is divine and everything comes out of this infinite non-being (see BG 11). The divine eye looks beyond the shapes and sees God everywhere.

Thoreau’s house was situated by a shore of Walden Pond, higher than Concord but low in the woods, the *Bhagavad Gita* gives instructions on how to prepare a spot for meditation and it explains that one should sit in a pure place which is neither too high, nor too low (see BG 6.11). These instructions have practical reasons as they prevent the person from falling or from being bitten by snakes and insects. Certain places as banks of rivers and ponds, mountains and open sky are especially helpful to calm one’s mind. Thoreau’s wood is a perfect place for meditation according to Indian philosophy as it is a quiet place with not too many visitors who could distract his exercise (see Sri Krishna Prem 81). It is important for good meditation that one has overcome wishes and desires, as those would only distract the yogi and give him a feeling of restlessness. The yogi needs to find a peaceful place which helps him to practice focused only on the mind without any distractions from the senses (see Paramahansa Yogananda 732). Thoreau definitely followed those instructions when he gave up his life in Concord and decided to buy a small wooden hut and build his home in the middle of the woods by a calm and clear pond. He constantly criticizes the attitudes of his fellowmen towards life who only think about worldly matters and do not shape their minds and search for something higher in their lives. Thoreau’s aim is obviously something higher than what he had found in his life so far and therefore he cuts himself off from his old life and starts a new and simple life in the woods, searching for the truth. In chapter 6 verse 10 in the Gita the yogi is encouraged to visit a secluded place and to meditate on his soul, this place is not merely a physical one, it actually means seclusion from the senses, withdrawing the attention from the senses and concentrating on the mind, seated in the third eye (see Paramahansa Yogananda 734)
The grass, skin and silk cloth bear symbolical meaning. The grass symbolizes the root chakra, which is the grounding centre. The skin stands as a symbol for the sacral chakra, as it was made by the nutrients of the blood, and the silk cloth denotes the solar plexus. Thoreau states that everyone is looking for a place to live, a spot to build his house on, the Laws of Manu also describe one of the four phases in life as the householder phase, where one settles down and raises a family.

When Thoreau moved into the hut in July 1845 it was still airy and the winds could enter it easily and brought with them the celestial parts of terrestrial music, the sound of creation heard only by a few, but forever blowing (see Thoreau 55) In the Bhagavad Gita the Pandavas blow their conches and produce different sounds, which can be heard by the meditating disciple. The ‘OM’ sound is the mother of all sounds and represents the creator and the substance of matter, this holy vibration is the connection between matter and spirit (see Paramahansa Yogananda 140) “The noise […] echoed through heaven and earth.” (BG 1.19).

Thoreau obviously senses that holy sound in the winds when speaking of the sound of creation. The hut was perfect to house a travelling god, it was open to nature, not closed off, but a part of it, always in exchange with its surrounding: “I am the purifying wind […]” (BG 10. 31). His house was open to the purifying wind, Thoreau is ready to get refined in the woods. Thoreau might himself feel like a travelling god living on Olympus, the residence of the gods, which he states is all over the world, if that is so, then everyone is a god as well. This notion refers to the philosophy of the Upanishads where it is repeatedly stated that man and Brahma are one, that everyone is a potential Brahma and it is only a matter of time when one will become ‘that’ (see Chakravarti 144). “A person (purusa), a thumb in length, rests in the midst of the self, Lord of past and future…One does not shrink away from it. This is that.” (Katha IV, 12). This sound is not heard by many, as there needs to be inner silence and peace for it to be sensed. One must long to hear it and as the Bhagavad Gita says in the seventh teaching, only one man among thousands strives for real knowledge (see BG 7.3).
5.2. The Awakening

Thoreau states that in the morning hours some part of us awakes that usually slumbers and that a day can only be of value if one gets awakened by one’s own force and soul within, and again Thoreau uses the metaphor of celestial music, which means ‘OM’, the sound of eternity (see Thoreau 58). One should not be awakened by factory bells or a servitor but by the celestial sound of the soul instead. In the first teaching of the Bhagavad Gita the Pandavas and Kauravas blow their conches and trumpets and produce a battlefield of sounds. The ego sends out its material vibration and at the same time the senses start distracting the meditating devotee, they produce piercing sounds whereas the soul produces fine celestial music. The soul tries to draw the devotee’s attention upwards to the spirit whereas the senses try to disperse his attention. The Yogi can only sense the celestial music when his consciousness has reached the astral level, as long as he lives in his body consciousness he can only perceive the lower vibes. Great volition is needed to win that psychological battle and it is a battle that needs to be fought over and over again (see Paramahansa Yogananda 136). When listening inside at first one will only hear the sounds of the heart, breath and blood circulation and the deeper one listens one will hear the cosmic vibration ‘OM’ and with enough concentration one will be able to see the light between the eyebrows, the light of the third eye (see Paramahansa Yogananda 138).

“Conches and kettledrums, cymbals, tabors, and trumpets were sounded at once and the din of tumult arose” (BG 1. 13). Thoreau definitely states that one should not awaken to the factory sounds, representing the sounds of the senses, but to the celestial sound of the soul, and one should strive for something higher every day. He is aware of the battle that goes on inside himself, but he wants to keep pace with the sun and live a perpetual morning, which means that he wants to keep his focus on the soul and the third eye which is symbolized by the sun (see Thoreau 58).

For Thoreau every day is a new chance for change, for him it is unthinkable that one does not long for something higher than one had fell before one last fell asleep. If one does not search for something higher then one is on a descending path. Morning stands for renewal, awakening, aspiring to something higher than the sensual life, it also stands for the aspiration for genius and wisdom, courage and moral values and for those who can keep pace with the sun, morning never ends (see Thoreau 58). “Your birth followed the birth of the sun” (BG 4. 4). For Thoreau being awake and being alive is a synonym which has also been used in Hindu philosophy. “We must learn to reawaken and keep
ourselves awake.” (Thoreau 59). Awakening is a process and must be done over and over again, one does not win the battle easily, great effort is needed to overcome all the enemies on the battlefield. Thoreau’s battle is led between physical labour and the intellectual life, synonymous with the battle at Kurukshetra in the Bhagavad Gita where Arjuna needs to fight his relatives. Once the soul has awakened there is no other way than fighting all the ties that have kept the soul asleep and tied it to the material world, such as established institutions, family, standards, religion, and race, but also inner desires and wishes. As long as the soul is fast asleep it does not feel the conflict, but as soon as it awakes it is not content with its former life anymore (see Sri Krishna Prem 27-29). For Thoreau awakening and elevating one’s life is something one can actively do, it is nothing one has to wait for, one does not need to wait for salvation, one rather needs to contribute to it, one can learn to attain it. One should make one’s day worthwhile, and Thoreau believes that nature will teach him how to do so, he wants to shake off all of life that was not really life. The Bhagavad Gita says, “Arjuna, the realm of sacred lore is nature – beyond its triad of qualities, dualities, and mundane rewards, be forever lucid, alive to your self.” (BG 2.45). Thoreau wants “to live deep and suck out the marrow of life” (Thoreau 59), which refers back to the press men needs to be squeezed through in order to eliminate all the false desires and thoughts (see Thoreau 16). Thoreau wants to find the essence of life, evidently he feels that there is more to life than society thinks there is and he desires to find this very core of life. The spine is an important tool in meditation and the marrow alludes to the upright position in meditation where one draws the energy up the spine and focuses it in the third eye. To suck the marrow out of it could therefore be a reference to focusing one’s attention on the higher self and not dispersing it in sensual pleasures. Keeping the spine straight is essential as it helps keep the mind alert. Another important part of meditation is the breath which should be regular and smooth, as there is a connection between the breath and the flow of thoughts, and in order to breathe correctly one needs to sit up straight (see Sri Krishna Prem 82).

The following lines sound like a declaration of war against all that is not true life, so that Thoreau can find out what life really is, and whatever the outcome he wants to learn from his own experience in opposition to the others who do not know life at all and, therefore, decided to glorify God instead of finding out the true meaning of life (see Thoreau 59).

Thoreau criticizes man for getting lost in detail while missing the true meaning of life, which can only be found by keeping things simple.
5.3. The Tree Of Life

The *Bhagavad Gita* states:

Roots in the air, branches below, the tree of life is unchanging, they say; its leaves are hymns, and he who knows it knows the sacred lore. Its branches stretch below and above, nourished by nature’s qualities, budding with sense objects; aerial roots tangled in action reach downward into the world of men. (BG 15. 2&3)

Man is a huge system of consciousness, living power and nerves that together make up the human body. The *ashvatta tree* (*a-shva-stah* meaning ‘not standing till tomorrow’) or *bodhi tree* is a symbol for the transience of the world and its creatures where change is the only constant (see Paramahansa Yogananda 1139). The tree of the *Gita* has its roots in Brahman and stretches down its branches. The tree itself is called the *Veda*, which is the content of all knowledge and the leaves symbolize the single verses and the individuals, so everyone who knows the truth about the tree of life is a *Veda*-knower (see Sri Krishna Prem 188). The tree of life is an old symbol known to many different peoples and symbolizes Mother Earth where nothing is without ending. The tree is one of the most significant connections between Walden and the Hindu scriptures. Thoreau was familiar with the tree of Good and Evil in the bible and he also knew the sacred ash-tree of the Scandinavians and the *bodhi tree* under which Buddha attained enlightenment (see Friedrich 44). *Prakriti*, cosmic primary matter – mother nature, creates a numberless diversity subject to never ending change, whereas the underlying creative power, life and the seeds of the tree are imperishable. The tree of life equates to the body and the soul (see Yoganada 6-18, 1130). Its branches stretch below and above, when stretched above they connect to higher knowledge and when stretched below they connect perception with the physical body and the level of matter. The branches serve as lines through which awareness is concentrated upwards or downwards according to the predominant *gunas* i.e. *sattva, raja* or *tamas* (see Paramahansa Yogananda 1136). The tree’s roots are above in the cosmic consciousness but there exist a second pair of them in the brain. Those finer roots consist of likes and dislikes, good and bad actions and wishes of former lives, they extend down to the nervous system and the senses and force man to act. By acting on his former wishes and acts man nourishes the tree of life and is reborn again and again, man is bound to life and death by the power of his desires and, therefore, the *ashvatta* tree is called an illusion which leads to reincarnation (see
Paramahansa Yogananda 1137). “[…] cut down this tree that has such deep roots with the sharp axe of detachment” (BG 15. 3).

The normal person has all three trees in him, the tree of consciousness, life and the nerves but neither understands the other, nor nature, so man feels confused by the cosmic creation. Sitting in the shade of the tree he can not see the heaven of cosmic consciousness (see Paramahansa Yogananda 1138-1139). The wise man cuts down the tree of egotism and sensual delights with the axe of detachment and knowledge and by that frees himself from habits and material desires and sees the heaven of eternity. “He is higher and other than the appearances of time and the tree.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad VI, 6). Thoreau also praises the advantages of freely enjoying an extensive horizon and he speaks of himself as living in a region that is more celestial and far from noise and distraction, for him time and place have changed and he feels a distance to his former life (see Thoreau 57). In order to gain total detachment one must destroy the self and come into the Self established in Light, only then, realizing that Brahman is all that exists will cut down the tree and one becomes a being freed from the wheel of reincarnation (see Sri Krishna Prem 188-189). Thoreau compares himself with a star shining in the sky only visible at night (see Thoreau 57).

Thoreau’s hut consists of upright studs which are saturated with dew in the mornings and exuding sap gives it an auroral look throughout the day (see Thoreau 55). The studs show some similarity to the process of meditation when one leads the energy up the spine and it gets slowly integrated into the system, the sap symbolizing the energy and aurora standing for renewal and change. Thoreau states later in the chapter that the auroral hour is sacred and he cites the Vedas, which claim that morning is the time when the intelligences awakens (see Thoreau 58).
5.4. The Importance Of Detachment

“[… ] for a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.” (Thoreau 53). Letting go is one of the most important features to be learned in Indian philosophy in order to gain spiritual freedom. Letting go is only possible if one has attained a feeling of oneness, for as long as one believes to be separate the ego will cling to anything, will feel likes or dislikes (see Sri Krishna Prem 69).

“Arjuna, actions do not bind a man in possession of himself, who renounces action through discipline and severs doubt with knowledge.” (BG 5.41, Miller). The treasure of nature can be enjoyed for free by everyone, it is not necessary to own a piece of land to absorb the beauty of it, just as the poet writes wonderful lines about a farm, Thoreau relishes the landscape without the urge to own it. Thoreau compares the poets action to milking and skimming milk, whereas the poet keeps the cream and the farmer gets the skimmed milk (see Thoreau 54). This picture often occurs with Krishna, who steals butter from someone, the butter symbolizing knowledge and the essence and the stealing standing for gaining knowledge out of every situation. Just like Krishna the poet steals the essence of the landscape, the most valuable part of it, while the farmer is occupied with the skimmed milk, mostly with making money.

For Thoreau living uncommitted was important, he compares owning a farm to being in jail, and therefore suggests staying independent as long as possible (see Thoreau 55). Thoreau sees the young man hunting and fishing as a person undergoing development, after some time the young man will leave such activities behind as he feels the seed of a better life in him grow and he therefore strives towards something new, leaving the old behind. “The mass of men are still and always young in this respect” (Thoreau 138). Obviously Thoreau believes that not many young boys have developed into men and gone towards a higher and better life, most of them stayed fishers and hunters and did not develop the skills of poets or naturalists. The Gita also states that among 1000 searching people only one will find God, but that most people do not even feel the urge to search for him and of those few who are searching only one out of 1000 eventually finds him. Here one can clearly see a parallel between Thoreau and the Gita, both stating that only a few manage to rise to the higher state of mind: “There is unquestionably this instinct in me which belongs to the lower orders of creation; yet with every year I am less a fisherman […];” (Thoreau 138).

5.5. Vegetarianism and Ahimsa

“The repugnance to animal food is not the effect of experience, but is an instinct.” (Thoreau 139). If one wants to attain or preserve one’s higher poetic faculties one has to abstain from animal food and eat less generally, so once the hunter evolves into a poet he automatically has to adapt his diet to keep this newly attained state of mind. Thoreau gives the example of butterflies which eat a lot in their larva state, but after their transformation, they eat much less, they still have an abdomen representing the larva, but feed only on a few drops of nectar: “The gross feeder is a man in the larva state; and there are whole nations in that condition, nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them.” (Thoreau 139).

Not only does the larva transform into a butterfly, also its nourishment changes from solid to liquid food, from leaves and fruits to honey and nectar. A butterfly can not feed on solid food and a man of higher mind cannot feed on meat that is why Thoreau is not fed essentially by it. For Thoreau it is an offence against the human race that man eats animals: “Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? […] this is a miserable way, […] and he will be regarded a benefactor of his race who shall teach man to confine himself to a more innocent and wholesome diet.” (Thoreau 140). Thoreau believes that it is humanity’s destiny to cease eating animal meat. If one listens to his genius one will sooner or later understand that arguments and customs are not the road to be followed, but that one has to be faithful to one’s own inner voice, even if it may lead one to extremes. Thoreau assures that if one follows this path one will experience immortal life and joy, life will smell like flowers and one will feel blessed, this is the true harvest of life (see Thoreau 140).

For Thoreau water is the only drink for wise men who only want to be intoxicated by the air they breathe. Not only does the genius tell the wise man to stop eating meat, vegetarian food also feeds the genius and inspires him with its taste, Thoreau states that one has to enjoy the food one is eating, to fully absorb it. If one eats like this, concentrating on the food and on its taste, one cannot become a glutton and overeat. The problem does not lie in what one eats, but much more in the reasons why one eats, food can nourish our body, inspire our spiritual life or just be eaten for the worms that possess us (see Thoreau 141). Here Thoreau compares a hunter who has a taste for mud-turtles and a lady who likes jelly made from calf’s hoof, one goes to the mill-pond whereas the other goes to her preserve-pot, both lead a beastly life and are possessed by
distorted tastes. What Thoreau wants to emphasize here is that tastes are made by society and created anew all the time, they are like worms that possess man and eat him up from the inside. Eating meat, according to Thoreau, is unclean and not ultimately satiating. For Thoreau “the hare cries like a child” (Thoreau 138), the animal is compared to a person and Thoreau excuses himself for not making “the usual philanthropic distinctions” (Thoreau 138) here he blurs the boarder between animals and human beings. For him, there is obviously no difference between animals and human beings concerning their will to live and their ability to feel pain. Thoreau states that all beings are held by the same tenure, by the same spirit and, therefore, are all interconnected.. This attitude is typical of the Hindu philosophy, where it is clearly stated that one should practice non-violence, *ahimsa*, towards all beings, which implies also being a vegetarian. Life as a whole is seen as divine and each life form, including all the elements, possess consciousness and energy, everything is part of the one Source and, therefore, should not be harmed. (What is Hinduism 343) Here you need author not book title

Sloth leads to ignorance and sensuality (see Thoreau 143) and, therefore, is impure and an attribute of lower nature. This lower “Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome.” (Thoreau 143).

*Ahimsa*, non-violence, must be learned, though, therefore Thoreau gives his friends advice to let their children hunt, as he thinks that every individual and every race has a time for hunters. According to Thoreau one does not get more humane if one has not had the education of hunting. Quite on the contrary, he believes that someone who knows how to hunt will outgrow this period of time and afterwards will not want to kill: “[…] any creature, which holds its life by the same tenure that he does.” (Thoreau 138). *Ahimsa* is a state of mind, which cannot forcefully be achieved, it must be understood, and this can only happen by the insight that all creatures are one and the same, that everything is made of the same essence and therefore whenever a living being gets hurt, all the rest gets hurt as well. As long as the mind has not understood this, one might be non-violent on the outside, but still have violent thoughts about killing.
5.5. Purity and Chastity

“Goodness is the only investment that never fails” (Thoreau 142). Thoreau claims that the laws of the universe never fail, and they show the sensitive the right way. Thoreau claims that we have an animal in us, which we might not be able to dispel totally, but our spirit has the ability to transform our passions into purity and devotion. (see Thoreau 142)

“A command over our passions, and over the external senses of the body, and good acts, are declared by the Ved to be indispensable in the mind’s approximation to God” (Thoreau 142). And further: “[…] the spirit can […] transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion.” (Thoreau 142). Also: “Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open.” (Thoreau 142).

Purity of the body, achieved by bathing, and purity of one’s thoughts, achieved by meditating, as well as purity of action, achieved by good deeds to which fruits one is detached and by leading a simple life, are the core values of the Gita and are also emphasized in Walden (see Friedrich 76).

The second path on the Eight-Fold Path of yoga includes purity of mind and body. All impure thoughts and feelings must be overcome, conceit, envy and pride need to be purified, and good-will and compassion should become part of the individual instead. Sometimes this process also includes austerities, where great heat or cold, hunger, non-speaking, or other physical and mental hardships have to be tolerated. Real purity means to acknowledge that God is the only force in the universe (see Prem 394). Purity is one way to God, but is not itself the goal (see Friedrich 78). The spirit has to control the body, when one is concentrated one’s energy inspires and enlivens one, whereas when one is loose the energy dissipates and makes one unclean. Thoreau sees chastity as one important way to God, as it makes one pure it opens the channel and man flows at once to God and the animal self slowly dies (see Thoreau 142). “Chastity is the flowering of man. From exertion comes wisdom and purity” (Thoreau 143) also: one has to “[…]avoid uncleanness, and all the sins, work earnestly […]” (Thoreau 143).
5.6. Nature as The Doorway to the Infinite

Nature in Hinduism is represented by eight goddesses, three of them: Saraswati, the centre of creation, standing for the wisdom of nature; Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance and happiness, and Gauri, standing for the domestic, are acceptable and favoured by culture, therefore mostly worshipped by people at home and in temples. Gauri stands for the suppressed nature, which is totally regulated by culture. Other goddesses Chinnamstika and Lalita-Tripurasundari stand for raw nature, which is perceived as pleasant. Durga a wild but still tamed goddess is accepted by culture as she stands for the natural instincts regulated by culture. Alakshmi, representing the inauspicious and untamed, and Kali, the fierce and dark part of nature are not desired or accepted in culture (see Pattanaik 199-200). In Walden all these aspects of nature can be found and Thoreau obviously tries to speak for the untamed, wild and dark parts of our nature, which need to be explored and by that enlightened. There are certain paths of yoga, as for example the Tantra yoga, where Kali, the dark, is the worshipped goddess. Instead of being afraid of one’s own dark and untamed spots, one should rather explore them and set the energy free, which is used in order to suppress these culturally unwanted features. This regained power can then be used to live one’s dreams irrespective of cultural norms, as one has developed out of them.8

Thoreau proclaims:

I rejoice that there are owls, let them do the idiomatic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which we all have. (Thoreau 82)

Thoreau here hints at the untamed and dark nature of the world, our emotions and thoughts. Just like Kali is not worshipped by many people, the dark sides are left aside by most people, their instincts are suppressed or only expressed in a way fit for society, the twilight is an uncomfortable zone for most people, as the regulations get less and therefore one would have to take one’s own decisions and face one’s own suppressed emotions.

Nature is seen as inhabited by spirit and as being a perfect environment. The pond throws off its nightly clothing of mist and the mist like ghosts withdraw into the woods.

8 http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/a/makali.htm,
The pond is a valuable neighbour to Thoreau as a place of peace in thunderstorms just like a lower heaven it reflects the clouds and the light (see Thoreau 56). By looking into the water one realizes that earth is not, “continent but insular” (Thoreau 57), considering the pun employed here by Thoreau he obviously thought his fellow men to be narrow-minded instead of being virtuous (see Thoreau 57).

The Concord Battle Ground (see Thoreau 56) somewhat compares to the field of Kurushetra in the Bhagavad Gita. Nature is seen as innocent and simple and Thoreau himself wants to be a part of it, so he gets up early to take a bath in the pond as a religious practice in order to renew himself everyday. Even the hum of a mosquito has something cosmic about it reminding Thoreau of the vigour and fertility of the world, comparable to the cosmic sound ‘OM’, which is the sound of creation (see Thoreau 58). In comparison: “He is the fire dwelling in the water.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad VI,15).

Thoreau felt at home wherever he sat down, for an hour, a summer or a winter, but he never bought any of the sites he liked: “Two birds, companions and friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet pippala-berry: The other looks on, without eating.” (Mundaka III, 1).

There is one consciousness which flows from birth to birth along the stream of time, manifesting itself in countless beings, the basis of all finite beings. Beyond it there is the unmoved Cosmic Consciousness, which is stainless light, unchanging and just watching (see Sri Krishna Prem 194-195).

Thoreau is a neighbour to the birds, not caging them, but himself living in a cage near them (see Thoreau 56). When he cites the Harivansa saying, “An abode without birds is like a meat without seasoning.” (Thoreau 56), describes perfectly the Indian thought of consciousness symbolized by a bird, as mere physical living is not at all satisfactory without the soul taking part in it: “He is the one goose in the midst of the world.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad VI,15). In the Upanishads the goose is mentioned several times, again in the Svetasvatara Upanishad the goose is compared to the soul that thinks of itself to be different from God, and it flutters as long as it believes this separation to be true, once it discovers its true self, it reaches immortality (see Svetasvatara Upanishad I,6).

Bird beings represent the ethereal realm, the firmament, in opposition to the serpent which represents earth, and the element of water, together they are antagonists, just as heaven and earth are. Vishnu is often depicted riding on a bird called Garuda, which means, “he who devours serpents” (Zimmer 75). Snakes, or Nagas are believed to be
superior to man, they inhabit ponds, lakes, rivers and seas and are keepers of the treasures of the water, they protect gems, pearls and wonderful palaces and undersea worlds. Nagas keep the life-energy of the waters, and it is said that they keep a precious jewel in their heads. They are known for their cleverness and they function as guardians to Hindu and Buddhist temples. Between the Nagas and Buddha there is no antagonism, they both represent elements and in India all the elements rejoice together, they all make up this universe and serve one universal principle (see Zimmer 66). There exist many pieces of art where gods have snakes around their heads or at their feet, often one finds cobras with open hoods sheltering the gods or Buddha from rain. In those images the serpent, symbolizing the life-force, life and death is in total harmony with the saviour, the imperishable and transcendent and by that all duality is resolved (see Zimmer 67-68).

Whereas the serpent represents earth, the mother of life who feeds all and who finally devours all, denying everything the celestial freedom and space, the bird represents the infinity of the skies, a higher spiritual principle. The bird is free, released from the bondage of matter, rising ever higher to the stars. In Indian philosophy the bird represents the sun, the spiritual principle, which comes down to devour the serpent. Representing God Vishnu the bird is the snake’s opponent and at the same time they both are manifestations of the Absolute, Vishnu, as in Vishnu all the opposites are born and all are one, all dichotomies are terminated. Only through the existence of the sun, the bird, on the one hand and earth, represented by the serpent on the other hand, can the universe exist (see Zimmer 76). In the end, however, Vishnu, the spiritual, represented by the bird will be the stronger force, ruling over the serpent. A good yogi brings those two forces together and places the spiritual over the earthly powers.

In Higher Laws Thoreau describes the inner hunger for animal flesh, the longing for wildness, as something innate, a part of human beings:

I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented. (Thoreau 136)

He describes how he was travelling through the woods in search of some wild animal to devour, only by the choice of his words can one feel the longing for wildness and the brutish nature of man. There is not even time to cook the venison, the beast in him wants to be fed right away and has no time and no need for cooking the meat and in addition it feels no need for beautification of the eaten and no mercy for the prey.
Thoreau admits that he sometimes likes to spend the days like animals. He admits that within himself he feels, “[…] an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both.” (Thoreau 136). Thoreau does not neglect his lower nature, his instincts, he notices them and he analyses them, which paves the way for a successful inclusion into the system, without suppression, but also without fully living each instinct.

He states that fishermen, woodchoppers and so on are more linked to nature than some poets are, as they live in nature and therefore are a part of nature. For Thoreau nature is more likely to exhibit herself to people who see themselves as a part of her, than those who only theoretically think about her, as many poets do. Those people will only get information second-hand. Thoreau also thinks that, “[…] perhaps the hunter is the greatest friend of the animals hunted […]” (Thoreau 137), which obviously contradicts what he states later in the same chapter, where he advocates a more innocent and wholesome diet (see Thoreau 140) without any meat.

Thoreau clearly states and admits that there is this lower instinct in him, but that with every year he grows more out of it, towards something higher and better:

There is unquestionably this instinct in me which belongs to the lower orders of creation; yet with every year I am less a fisherman […]; at present I am no fisherman at all. But I see that if I were to live in a wilderness I should again be tempted to become a fisher and hunter in earnest. (Thoreau 138)

What exactly he means by wilderness is unclear, as he lives in the woods, which could be defined as wilderness, possibly Thoreau thinks of wilderness as a state of mind he has left. In contrast to his desire to devour the woodchuck raw Thoreau states that animal food is unclean, he obviously means the procedure from the raw meat to a cooked meal is bloody and brutal. He describes himself as a butcher, a cook and the gentleman being served and therefore has a complete picture of how the final meal was prepared, which most of his fellowmen did not have, being only served a perfect looking meal and not having to do with the rather bestial preparation. Opposing to this a sentence later Thoreau states that, “The repugnance to animal food is not the effect of experience, but is an instinct.” (Thoreau 139). If one wants to attain or preserve one’s higher poetic faculties one has to abstain from animal food and eat less generally, so once the hunter evolved into a poet he automatically has to adapt his diet to keep this newly attained state of mind: “I fear that we are such gods or demigods only as fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to the beasts, the creatures of appetite […]” (Thoreau 142). And thence, “Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome.” (Thoreau 143).
5.6.1 Sounds and Celestial Music

Thoreau views hawks, pigeons, reed-birds and fishhawks from his window; the circling hawk is a symbol also used in the *Upanishads*. In the chapter, *The Sounds*, Thoreau describes in detail the many birds he is surrounded by, which are chanting serenades and vespers and circle around him with a buzzing sound. It is said that the yogi hears a buzzing sound when entering deep meditation, first it is the circulation of the blood that is heard, but later in deep meditation this sound is very subtle and is a sign of connection to God’s energy. It is said that light and sound are the primary manifestations of God, the universe is made of vibration which can be heard as sound and seen as colours. The outer sounds and light we hear and see are only a weak representation of the true celestial music and the true light: “This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore.” (Thoreau 84) says Thoreau in the chapter *Solitude*, his whole body has become one sense, like a turtle he has withdrawn from the outside and is focussed inside, totally controlling the bodily functions. By concentrating only on the third eye, one will hear the wonderful music of higher realms and be able to travel there (see Singh 21 – inner and outer peace). This inner sound current, or *Bani*, is the source of everything, it is an ocean of bliss and love, taking the disciple back to the source. *Shabd*, the inner sound, is the true *amrit*, the true nectar of immortality, which needs to be dug out through meditation. Drinking this nectar, hearing the *Shabd*, one attains a state of bliss and finds all the happiness in oneself (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 373). The whole universe is seen as one, there is no duality and distinction, one realizes that God is the ocean and the soul is a drop of it, there is no separateness and no parts of creation, all is one (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 377). When Thoreau speaks of the cockerel as the most remarkable of all the birds, and his crowing, as having the power to put nations on alert, to make people rise earlier and strive for wealth every day, one gets the impression that the sound is not an outward sound, but rather something that comes from the inside (see Thoreau 83). This sound is innate to everyone, independent from their nation, it is a universal sound, the sound of God’s calling every individual to rise and long for more (see Goto 132). Even though there is no cockerel around, Thoreau can sense the sound of its crowing, it is a spiritual sound appearing in himself, the *Shabd*, which revives the body and the soul, bringing creativity to the individual and making them feel enlarged and connected with their environment. The imagination widens, thoughts deepen and
one attains a broader understanding of the world, the whole being expands and merges with the universe (see Goto 134-135). One hears the Shabd inwardsly and this connection with the sound current and the higher realms prompts one to speak of this experience and it creates the wish to expand the inner harmony and bliss towards others as well (see Goto 135).

*Shabd* is the same essence as our soul and therefore guides us the way back to our source, there are different manifestations of *Shabd* mentioned in different planes of creation, but their essence is one. In different regions it needs to take different forms, more subtle in the higher ones and less subtle in the lower regions (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 380). There are lower melodies and higher ones, just as the birds have mentioned in *Walden*. At night, when all the birds stop their songs the owls come out and begin their mourning and screeching. Thoreau compares their sounds to a graveyard song, they represent the dark and mournful side of life, low spirits and lost and sinful souls. The owls are the counterpart to the joyful birds that sing during the day, they show the variety of life and nature, there is not only the bright and joyful side of life, there also exists the dark and dramatic side and both co-exist. We all live in this duality and it is important to notice its existence and not to repress the dark side which is part of each of us as well. Healing can only take place if the dark side is respected and seen as a part of the whole, our unsatisfied thoughts and emotions, our desires and fears they all need to be brought to light, as the sun shines on the savage swamps and dries them out (see Thoreau 82).

In Hindu philosophy it is believed that there are different ages, called the *yugas*, the *Kali yuga* being the darkest one, encompassing the lowest state of mankind and the universe. The owl can also be conceived as a symbol for this *yuga*, where mankind is lost in this world and matter, totally separated from God, in a mournful and sinful state, but after this time a new day arises, new hope is given by the rise of the sun which awakes a, “different race of creatures to express the meaning of Nature.” (Thoreau 82). Thoreau paints the picture of bullfrogs doing the same ritual again and again, saturated, waterlogged and bloated trying to forget their past until the sun disperses the morning mist (see Thoreau 82-83). Mankind is saturated with matter, vibrating very low and surrounded by mist dimming the sunlight, not able to see the sun and the truth behind nature. Only when the sun disperses the mist and shines fully the soul can see its origin and escape from the dense world of matter.

Only by connecting oneself with the sound and light current can one escape this world of matter, starting his meditation the devotee will hear many different sounds
before he reaches the inner eye, for example he will hear sounds like those made by crickets, or even those of a running train (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 387). Thoreau writes about the train which passes the wood, that it makes the hills echo, and the earth shake, and he even calls it “a celestial train”, (Thoreau 76) every sound is sacred to him, because he knows that in essence they are all the same, just manifested as different vibrations. Once started with meditation, one will hear many low and maybe even disturbing sounds, which come from the different chakras, it will take some exercise unless one has entered the third eye, the doorway to the heavenly sounds. The Nada Bindu Upanishad also mentions this phenomenon by warning the disciple that in the beginning one will hear many loud sounds, which will gradually increase in pitch and can be sensed stronger and stronger, the sounds can be described like waves of an ocean, clouds passing in the sky, one will also hear drums, conches and bells (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 348). Thoreau makes a clear reference to the sound current when saying, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.” (Thoreau 210). The sound current guides you to your soul, to your very essence and therefore makes you act according to your own nature, which might not fit into social restrictions or expectations of others. It also makes you strong and brave enough to speak the truth, “Who that has heard a strain of music feared then lest he should speak extravagantly any more forever?” (Thoreau 210). Connected with the celestial music, one does not care about customs and traditions, about restrictions in action and speech, one knows the truth, and one speaks it, even, if it is unexpected and cannot be comprehended by most of the others.

Thoreau hears no noises, for him every sound is music, the mosquito sings a serenade, the frogs sing and the whippoorwills chant vespers, all together sing a perfect kirtan, a divine song for God:

Little is to be expected of that day, if it can be called a day, to which […] we are not awakened by our own newly acquired force and aspirations from within, accompanied by the undulations of celestial music […] (Thoreau 58)

Meditation is essential for an awakened life, the morning hours are said to be best for mediation, as there is the least distraction and one can fill one’s body and mind with the energy needed for the day: “Keep your own track, then” (Thoreau 77). One can only go one’s own path, if one has knowledge of it, therefore connection to the soul is of great importance before one starts to act. Therefore it is unavoidable that this practice needs to be done every day in order to be successful and to really establish a connection to the soul “Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again.” (Thoreau 58). “We must learn to reawaken and to keep ourselves awake.” (Thoreau 59).
5.6.2. Colours And Light

In *The Ponds* Thoreau describes Walden Pond in detail, not only describing the sounds to be heard, but also focussing on the light and the pond’s colours. The most frequent colours to be found are white, green and blue tones, all important colours in Hinduism. Thoreau describes the way a body looks, when bathing in Walden Pond, taking the colour of white alabaster and reflecting a crystalline purity (see Thoreau 115). Bathing in the universal ocean of knowledge, in oneness, a person becomes pure and crystalline, they expand themselves becoming one with the source of life: “I am the ocean of lakes” (BG ch10, 24).

White includes everything, it is perfection, knowledge in itself. A person meditating regularly clears his aura which will finally enlarge more and more until he becomes one with his surroundings and sees everything in himself, just as Arjuna sees the whole world in front of him in chapter eleven of the Gita. Arjuna dives into the universe, he realizes that all its different parts are one, becoming one with the timeless spirit, *the knower and what is to be known* (see BG ch11, 38). Such a deep vision can only be attained by *bhakti*.

Physically, white is a mixture of all 7 colours, therefore it contains the qualities of all its different parts. In Hinduism it stands for peace, knowledge, purity and cleanliness. One also associates the upper caste, the Brahmins, and Saraswati with the colour white, always being painted in white robes, sitting on a white lotus. White is also worn when Hindus are mourning. One could also conclude that white is the colour of the One, as it contains everything in it, just as the One contains all. In the *Gita, Krishna* is described as containing seven cosmic planes, named as seven gods, just as white light sent through a prism produces beams of colourful light, Krishna, the One, divides himself into different planes of existence with higher and lower vibration rates, just as the different colours vibrate in different frequencies (see Sri Krishna Prem 146).

Blue is the colour of the sky, the infinite, therefore many Hindu gods are depicted in blue tones or sometimes in black. The colour blue is connected with *Lord Vishnu, Lord Ram, Lord Shiva* and *Lord Krishna*, symbolizing their all pervading reality and immeasurable energy.  

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Lord Krishna’s name even means dark or blue. Lord Vishnu is the preserver of the world and therefore connected to water and the universe. Shiva is also known as neel kanth, meaning blue-throated. The colour blue also represents the throat chakra, the Vishuddha, usually depicted as a 16 petalled lotus with a blue triangle inside, it represents pure consciousness and creativity, and governs expression, inspiration and speech.11

Here Thoreau is talking about an indescribable light blue: “[...] more cerulean than the sky itself, [...]”. The pond and the river described can also stand for the root chakra, the Muladhara, as this chakra is connected to liquids, it controls the bladder and the sexual organs, and it is connected with the above mentioned throat chakra, therefore a dysfunction in one chakra can lead to problems in the other as well (see Master Choa Kok Sui 78).

The rising and falling of the pond mentioned by Thoreau once again can be seen as a symbol of the two tidal urges ruling the world, the one expanding and the other contracting the universe and its energy (see Thoreau 117). Thoreau also explains the irregularity and the time the rising and falling of the water takes, mentioning 12 to 15 years of duration, until the water is as low as it was again. The same is true of the tides of the primal energy, Atman (see Sri Krishna Prem 146). Thoreau merges with the energies of the waters of the pond, and its surroundings, just like a true disciple of Bhakti, Thoreau sees God in everything, in every atom of the water, in the fish, in the colours, the birds and the skies. Observing nature is a way of meditation for Thoreau, it is not merely physical interest that makes him measure and observe his environment, by doing so Thoreau enters a different world, he becomes one with his surrounding and by that expands himself. He is no longer a person separate from this world, much more has he become one with it and trespassed the door to the universal energy.

The way he describes the pond is of such beauty that it can compete with the Hindu scriptures, it is uplifting and can by no means only be taken as mere realistic description of a pond. Thoreau observes nature and by becoming one with it he begins to understand its profound laws, “[...] the shore is shorn, and the trees cannot hold it by right of possession.” (Thoreau 118). Mother nature gives and takes, there is no way out of this circle, just as Arjuna understands in the Bhagavad Gita in chapter 11, that Krishna is a complex of creating gods and mouths of consuming flames, he is the creator and the destroyer and it all emerges from him and goes back to him. The waters of the pond make the shore fertile, but once the waters rise again, it swallows its creation and

the circle begins anew. The pond symbolizes the great cosmic ocean, in which Vishnu, the creator, in this form referred to as Narayana, meaning ‘lying in the waters’, rests. The water represents the potential for creation, all the possible phenomena rest in it, and Vishnu is sleeping on the head of a serpent, Ananta, meaning ‘endless’, the possibilities of creation are endless. The world comes into existence when Brahma emerges out of Vishnu, the myth states that a lotus grew out of Vishnu’s navel pillowing Brahma, out of who all creation emanated (see Dimmit 16, 17). The world exists as long as Brahma breathes out and at the end of the circle is drawn back, in order to dissolve in the ocean of potentiality again. Once again we find Thoreau talking about the trees, which send out their roots into the waters in summer, in order to sustain themselves, the tree again a symbol for man, being rooted in the cosmic ocean, being maintained by its endless energy. Also the blueberry bushes, which usually don’t grow fruit, are loaded in the summer months when sustained by the waters of the pond. Only when one is rooted in the universal energy of the One, can one grow and bear fruit, without the nurturing waters the trees and the blueberries cannot survive on the shore. Just like these plants, man cannot survive in this world without being rooted in the cosmic ocean, only by growing firm roots into these waters, can man live a life of self-realisation, the fruits of one’s worldly actions can only be plentiful and lead towards spiritual progress, when one’s roots are firm in the universal ocean. In order to grow such roots and to keep them fixed there, man needs to practice meditation and bhakti yoga. Thoreau describes the lake as the, “[…] earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.” (Thoreau 121).

The lake serves as a doorway to oneself and to God, much the same as the Hindu gods of adoration do. The gods are described and depicted in loving detail, the same counts true for Thoreau’s description of Walden Pond, which is deified and tenderly characterized as an eye, with the trees serving as eyelashes and hills as brows. This passage reminds the reader of passages in Hindu scriptures where the different gods are described in perfect detail and in chapter 11 in the Gita, where Krishna shows himself to Arjuna as a huge body, containing the whole of creation. Arjuna sees his countless eyes, and one of these eyes for Thoreau is Walden Pond, an expression of the divine, Thoreau also describes how the sun is reflected on the smooth and still pond, as bright as the real sun (see Thoreau 121). This picture again can be found in chapter 11 in the Bhagavad Gita, when it says, “[…] hard to behold in the burning light of fire and sun […]” (BG II, 16). The verses 15-34 of chapter 11 are a hymn of praise to the universal mind in the form of the universe, a hymn to the universal dream and its dreamer, this
passage is often sung at religious ceremonies and creates a healing vibration sung in Sanskrit. Reading *The Pond* one feels drawn into a different world, every detail is mentioned to the reader, the whole body of the pond is outlined meticulously, just as the body of the universe is outlined in the *Gita*, not leaving out one single detail. Thoreau created a hymn to Walden Pond, his God of adoration. On seeing the stone heaps on the ground of the pond, Thoreau at first thought they were there by mistake, soon concluding that they are too regular for that (see Thoreau 120). The universe might seem irregular and unfathomable to those not able to view behind the phenomena, caught in matter, but for those who are able to lift the veil all the seeming irregularities and mistakes make perfect sense and are part of a universal plan. Every insect and animal in the pond is honoured by Thoreau: the frogs, tortoises, fish and water bugs, he realized every movement in the pond by watching the circles left behind.

The pond is described as clear water giving free sight to the bottom, exactly what the mind of a meditating person should be like, calm and clear, so that one can see deep into one’s soul. Thoreau used this metaphor when he wrote about the pond being an eye which serves as a doorway to one’s own nature (see Thoreau 121) and he elaborates this thought on the following pages. The insects and fish leave traces of every movement, just the same as thoughts disturb the calmness of our mind, thoughts are often described as ripples on the lake of the mind, stepping back and watching oneself, one will realize how many thoughts disturb the mind every second. From a hilltop one can see the fish jump which “disturbs the equilibrium of the whole lake” (Thoreau 122). The sun, Thoreau writes, is watching this game of circles, symbolizing the soul watching the disciple’s mind wandering away, it is a difficult task to still one’s mind, “[…] the dimpling circles which are incessantly inscribed on the otherwise invisible surface amid the reflected skies and trees.” (Thoreau 122). The incessant appearing of thoughts and wishes keeps the surface of our lake rippled and obscure, we cannot mirror our true soul and find our purpose in life as long as we are misled by so many thoughts. Only a still lake reflects its environment, the skies and the sun and therefore becomes invisible, merges with its surrounding, becomes one with all. When we succeed in meditation we can still our mind to a calm lake, reflecting our true being, our soul, symbolized by the sun, and we finally see ourselves in everything around us, we become one with all. The sun, our soul is described as sitting on a stump studying the irregularities of the water, like the soul in meditation is a still observer of our thoughts and emotions. During meditation, not a single thought can pass unnoticed, just like no fish or insect on Walden Pond can move without leaving traces on the surface, one is fully alert and
under control of the mind, thoughts and feelings pass like clouds on the sky, and become less influential on our soul’s equilibrium. It is a peaceful state, in which the slightest movements and sounds can be sensed, the body and mind is open and expanded, sensing life much more intense. Thoreau tells us about the peaceful scenery around the pond, how every twig and leaf shines and sparkles in the sun, and how the slightest sounds can be heard. Meditation opens the soul to new experiences of sight and sound, one gets more sensitive to one’s surroundings. Walden Pond is praised as a perfect mirror, peaceful and pure, nothing else so pure as a calm lake can be found on earth (see Thoreau 122), and nothing purer than a calm mind can be found in a person, no stone can crack this mirror where the sky and earth melt and become one, nothing can harm a person who has established such a calm lake inside. Once the soul can reflect fully in our mind’s mirror, self realisation has been attained, one lives his full potential on earth and this treasure can never be taken away by anyone, just as no storm or dust can dim the pond’s surface, the soul cannot be dimmed, every impurity is cleansed by it (see Thoreau 123). The water is in continuous exchange with both the earth and the sky, exactly what a person in meditation tries to do, connect with the soul in order to live its full potential here on earth.

Thoreau definitely has a higher awareness of his environment, using such detailed description of the smallest insects and the faintest sounds, which most people would not even notice. His meditation has become a meditation on nature, totally losing himself, opening his senses and absorbing all the energies around him, his days have become a prayer in themselves, one can feel the humbleness he feels for this creation. He describes this feeling by saying, “[…] I seemed to be floating through the air as in a balloon.” (Thoreau 123).

The fish-hawk catches fish in a glassy pond, the water stands as a symbol for the mind in Hindu philosophy, it should be calm and glassy so that it mirrors the soul clearly, and makes it possible for the person to act according to it (see Thoreau 74). The fishhawk’s descending, diving into the water and catching the fish, can also be seen as a symbol of the soul. The soul is, however, also often symbolized as a bird or an eagle, which flows down the spiral canal and awakens the Kundalini energy in the root chakra, which controls the sexual organs and the bladder.

Lakes and seas in general play an important role in Indian mythology; not only was the universe created out of a big ocean, there are many other stories dealing with water, snakes and the gods. Most of the lakes in India are holy and used for certain religious
rites, as well as the rivers, of which most carry the name of a god, for example, the holy Ganga, the river Saraswati, and Yamuna river. Varuna, the Vedic water god is usually depicted riding on a crocodile-like sea monster, and Vishnu had a body half human, half fish, in his first incarnation, called Matsya. In order to create the universe Brahma needed the holy books, which were kept drowned in the ocean, and therefore it is said that Vishnu turned into a fish to save the Vedas from being stolen by a demon. During Brahma’s night, when all creation was being absorbed again, Vishnu instructed a rishi to collect plants, herbs and animals and to build a ship, which when the rain finally came and swallowed the earth and all its inhabitants, was tied to his horn and together with the serpent king, Vasuki, Matsya pulled the ship through Brahma’s night, saving mankind and nature.  

Thoreau mentions the sacred Ganga in The Ponds and states that the Walden Pond should be “as sacred as the Ganga at least” (Thoreau 125). Sagara once organized a big horse sacrifice, in which a horse is set free by a king to roam around wherever it pleases for a year. Should the horse come into hostile provinces these need to be subjugated. The horse is accompanied by a hundred young men. Sagara’s horse got stolen though and therefore, he ordered his sixty thousand sons to look for the horse and bring it back. His sons started searching and ploughed the whole earth, killing many demons and having the earth cry out in pain. After a long search they found the sage Kapila next to the horse, accusing him of having stolen their horse while attacking him with trees and spades. Kapila, after a while, sent out a huge flash and burned all the sons to death. After a long time Sagara’s grandson, Suman, was sent out to look for his uncles. He found out about their fate, the water of the Ganga was needed in order to send his uncles to heaven, and was advised to take home the horse and complete the sacrifice. Years later Suman’s grandson went to woods to meditate and draw down the river Ganga to finally rescue the burned sons. Lord Brahma was pleased by his devotion and therefore told Bhagiratha to pray to Shiva, as he would be needed to catch the Ganga in her flow, otherwise the earth couldn’t bear her power. Bhagiratha did what he was told and after many years Lord Shiva agreed to catch the daughter of the Himalayas with his hair and immediately Ganga flew down from heaven and got caught in Shiva’s locks, where she stayed for some years before Shiva, after years of more devotion by Bhagiratha, set her free in seven streams, one following Bhagiratha’s horse, until they finally reached the

http://www.webonautics.com/mythology/avataar_matsya.html,

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nether regions and the ashes of the sixty thousand sons were cleansed and attained to heaven.  

The legend of Ganga’s birth can be interpreted in two ways, on the one hand as a cosmic event, and on the other hand happening in each individual. Cosmically seen, the river stands for the divine consciousness flowing from the highest planes of creation down to the lower ones, the stream of creation flowing down from the cosmic ocean. As the lower worlds are not yet ready to bear the high vibrations of the divine river, Lord Shiva keeps it in his hair until the earth has developed far enough to cope with this high energy, and he transforms her energy so that it can be received by lower regions. When he releases Ganga, he separates her into seven streams, spreading the divine energy into all directions.

Interpreted on the level of the individual this myth might symbolize the flowing down of divine energy into the energy body of the meditating person. Bhagiratha went into the forest for hundreds of years, which suggests that a lot of effort is needed to finally draw the divine energy into one’s energy body, and that it happens step by step. After Brahma had been prayed to for a long period of time, Lord Shiva needed to be meditated on, for only with his help could the river fall down from heaven, without destroying the whole body. Lord Shiva is needed to lower the divine energy in order not to damage the energy body of the meditating disciple. The Sahasrara, the crown chakra, which is represented by the lotus with a thousand petals, is said to be the abode of Lord Shiva, representing the cosmic consciousness. The Muladhara, the root chakra, is depicted with four petals, each of them standing for one of the psychological states of great joy, pleasure, delight in controlling one’s passions, and happiness in concentration, which represent the bliss of achieving the divine in the physical body. Brahma is the deity of this chakra, depicted next to Indra and Dakini, and one also finds an up-side-down triangle with a snake coiled around a lingam, represented in the root chakra. The coiled snake symbolizes the Kundalini energy, the shakti, or life force, which slumbers in the root chakra. The legend of Ganga therefore is an instruction on how to prepare for the stream of divine energy, first one needs to pray to Brahma, symbolically standing for the root chakra, the Muladhara needs to be awakened and cleansed, the Kundalini must rise up the spine and by doing so cleanse the energy system of the whole body.  

When Brahma, the root chakra, reacts to our desire to unite with the divine stream, Shiva is needed as well, therefore the next step is to open the

14 http://www.kheper.net/topics/chakras/Muladhara.htm.
crown chakra, which will soften the power of the cosmic energy to an extent that our body is capable of receiving it. Once the yogi has reached this stage in meditation the Ganga, the stream of divine consciousness, can flow through him and he will reach enlightenment.

Water plays an essential part in Hindu mythology and it is always sacred. Another example is the Khumb Mela, which is held every three years in rotation in Haridwar, Allahabad, Nasik and Ujjain. The origin of this celebration, which is nowadays visited by millions of people from over the world, goes back to the Puranas and the Sagar Manthan, which tells us that there was a fight for power between the demigods and the demons, who had lost all their powers and asked Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu advised them to cooperate with the demigods and churn the ocean of milk until the amrita, the nectar of immortality would come up. So they all together churned the ocean, using Mount Mandara as the post and the serpent Vasuki as the stick. It was agreed that one would share the nectar, but the secret plan was that the demigods should hide the amrita as soon as they got it. The churning brought up deadly fumes, which were immediately swallowed by Lord Shiva, whose throat turned blue as a result and provided him with the name Neelkanth, the blue-throated. After that the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi, then the moon, a nymph, a white horse, a jewel, the celestial tree, the cow of plenty, a white elephant, a bow and a conch shell appeared out of the ocean. Finally the amrit came up in a pot and was immediately taken away by the demigods, the demons, however, followed the demigods and the fight for the pot (kumbha) continued for twelve days. During this fight the pot, or some drops of the amrita (legends differ here) touched the ground at four places, and these are the places where the Kumbh Mela has been celebrated for centuries (see What is Hinduism 242). As the Puranas mention a day in heaven equals one year on earth and, therefore, the Kumbh Mela is held every twelve years in each place.  

These myths have a deep meaning for those who see beneath the surface, just as nature reveals its secrets to those who are able to sense them, myths reveal their secrets to true adepts who want to see the truth. Just like the churning of the ocean brings up deadly fumes at first, the person who starts to meditate will face many troublesome thoughts and emotions, which can be overwhelming at times. As our consciousness consists of uncountable layers of former lives, there is a lot of churning to do until all the fumes have passed. Lord Shiva swallows the fumes, thereby saving the world.

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Lord Shiva has his seat in the crown chakra, but also in the Ajna chakra, the third eye, where he sits as Shiva and Shakti, the male and female representation. The Ajna chakra gives insight into the past, present and future, it is the eye with which one needs to explore oneself. With this instrument it is possible to go back many lives and to travel into higher realms of existence. It is also a place of balance, symbolized by its two lotus petals, a neutral place, from which one can watch everything from a distance, without getting too much troubled or upset. It is the place where Ida (the female current) and Pingala (the male current) finally meet, after they have started to move upwards from the root chakra and crossed all the chakras between. The merging of the two currents, also represented by the Shiva-Shakti symbol, creates a feeling of oneness. This chakra is also the seat of clairvoyance and knowledge, which finally brings the mind under control and gives total command over the self, the deadly fumes, standing for fears, desires and overwhelming emotions therefore need to be conquered by steadfastly concentrating on the third eye.\textsuperscript{17} The instruments used for the churning are Mount Mandara, which could stand for the pineal gland which needs to be stimulated in meditation and once sparked creates a light a thousand times brighter than the sun. The pineal gland is situated in the centre of the brain, has the shape of a cone and the size of a pea, and produces the hormone Melatonin, which is responsible for feelings of calmness. The chakra connected with the pineal gland is the crown chakra. The snake, which clearly refers to the Kundalini energy that needs to be raised upwards and churn, awaken all the other chakras while passing them.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} http://www.tantra-kundalini.com/ajna.htm.,
\textsuperscript{18} http://www.dhyansanjivani.org/pineal_gland_chakra.asp.,
6. Three Ways to One’s Salvation and Self-Realization

The following chapters will discuss the three different yoga paths and compare them to Thoreau’s *Walden*. A short introduction of the yoga system will be followed by a detailed interpretation of Walden according to the three paths, *karma yoga*, *jnana yoga* and *bhakti yoga*. Yoga practices help the individual to analyze and understand their mind. Its metaphysics is based on twenty-five categories, *prakrti* and *purusha* being the most important. *Prakriti* is the cause of the universe, except the spirit, it is made out of the three *gunas* which are called, *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattvas*. *Prakrti* can be experienced through the phenomena of the world, it is an active principle, including also time and space.

*Purusha*, however is an individual spiritual expression, which explains the difference in people and cultures. The individual self, *jiva*, is *purusa* combined with a body, which leads to the conclusion that the *jiva* consists of two aspects, the perishable body and the unchangeable self. (see Kumar 373)

The yoga system includes the existence of God, who is the continuous principle behind all creation and spirit, he is untouched, all-knowing, detached, patient, creative and free from any desires. There exists one supreme God, but it is also stated that there are many individual spirits or gods attached to this life. God sometimes loosens his control over *prakrti* and by that enables individuals to find self-realization, he can be known by sages which use the symbol ‘OM’ to refer to him. (see Kumar 389)

There are different yogic ways, all of them aiming at the attainment of freedom and self-realization. Usually the path of *karma yoga*, or *kriya yoga*, is seen as inferior to the path of knowledge, as for the latter, a higher intellect is needed. Introverted people should prefer the path of knowledge, whereas the path of action is suitable for more extrovert individuals. Most people will follow both paths to some extent, as we are all a mixture of introverted and extroverted characteristics. (see Kumar 390)

The *Gita*, however, mentions three paths of yoga, adding *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of devotion to the former two. The yoga of the *Gita* is religious, believing that Krishna is an incarnation of God, who teaches his disciples how to find liberation. (see Kumar 397)

All the yoga systems include the reading of the scriptures, meditation upon God, concentration, detachment and non-violence, as the main paths to liberation and self-realization. (see Kumar 392-393).
6.1. *Karma Yoga Or Kriya Yoga, The Path of Action*

Karma yoga describes the path of action, action can never be fully given up, even on the spiritual path one is forced to act, and this action also arises from Brahman, and, therefore is divine in itself. Action itself is neither good nor evil, what makes it either the one or the other is the motivation behind it and how it is performed. If one acts out of selfish motives, or anger and deceit one is driven into darkness and will act foolishly. Therefore it is suggested that one acts out of selflessness and renounces all the fruits of one’s actions. The pleasure is to be found in oneness with Atman, then there is no need to search for fulfilment of desires in sense pleasure or action. Once achieved this oneness with God satisfies the person fully and all action can be done without any attachment, by that becoming divine oneself, creating and acting without personal desire, only focused on the well-being of the world. Action performed in this state of mind does not bind man to reincarnation and will not accumulate any further karma, thus freeing man from the circle of samsara (see Werner 142). Only through action can man develop and move from gross matter to higher regions of consciousness. The aim of life, a life without work can paradoxically only be achieved by endless freeing action. One can not gain oneness with God simply by being lethargic, or renouncing life completely. Mankind is trapped in matter and the pleasures of the senses, no matter how far they move into the woods, as long as people are attached to the senses and the world leaving the world does not help without proper meditation. Renunciation alone is not sufficient, the true God seeker is active in a divine way while seeking to eliminate restlessness and passions. He follows the moral laws, exercises meditation, and does service to his fellow people (see Paramahansa Yogananda 409). It is of no use renouncing action and at the same time being tied to the world in the mind, rather a yogi should stay part of the world and not be part of it, not be attached to it, while remaining actively involved in life. It is not the outer appearance which is important, but the inner attitude to life. *Karma yoga* is the preparation for *dhyana yoga*, the path of meditation, as being unattached to the fruits of one’s action paves the road for successful meditation. In the Gita advice is given to Arjuna on how to prepare for successful meditation, starting with the instruction to find a quiet place to sit down for a while and fix the gaze on the third eye (see Werner 142-143).

In the first chapter Thoreau starts his *karma yoga*, he is preparing to build his house, as he goes and borrows an axe to cut down some trees. The act of borrowing, he states, permits one’s fellow-men to partake in one’s life and, therefore, is connecting and can
also be seen as an action of detachment, not wishing to own the axe. The axe is a symbol for knowledge in Indian philosophy, usually used to cut down the tree of life, and in the same way is the metaphor used here by Thoreau. The axe was returned sharper than it was lent, knowledge got stronger (see Thoreau 26). Knowledge is only useful if gained by experience, and it can only be borrowed by the divine, real knowledge is never the achievement of the person itself, it is always given by God’s grace.

Thoreau’s bean field is a field of experience, a field to gain knowledge. The beans are complex metaphors for Hindu and Buddhist values such as “[…] sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like.” (Thoreau 106). Thoreau believes that those crops are not planted enough and that it is hard to have them bear fruit. “This generation is very sure to plant corn and beans each new year […]” (Thoreau 107). Thoreau thinks that it is more important to cultivate ourselves than our fields, to grow values such as mentioned above and that we should have time for each other, we should live up to our full value.

If one sees the field as a metaphor for life then the beans would represent everything that one does, all the actions and thoughts of man. Then Thoreau actually thrives for knowledge, for insight into his life, he wants to know about his life, why certain things happen to him, and why he does the things he does. One might compare this picture to the Gita where the law of Karma is described. Thoreau hoes his beans and dives into the ocean of time, he finds relics of times long passed, pottery, glass as well as hunting and war tools; on the one hand, this is an allusion to the circle of time where everything is repeated over and over again, cultures die out and are forgotten, new cultures arise and the same game starts all over again. On the other hand, Thoreau might encounter the depth of his soul, his countless lives, where from war to being a woman everything might have been experienced and has left traces in his ever developing soul. As Thoreau writes, “It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans” (Thoreau 103) which suggests, that he, as the person Thoreau did not exist anymore at that very moment, but he had become part of something bigger, and also the beans were part of that larger field.

“I hoe them early and late I have an eye on them” (Thoreau 101). As the Hindu scriptures say one should practice early in the morning and in the evening, the yoga scriptures and also the Gita states that one must focus on the third eye, the point between the eyebrows. Meditation is a tool to hoe negative thoughts and attitudes and plant positive and good ones instead. “First look out for worms, and supply vacancies
by planting anew” (Thoreau 106). The meditating person has to watch out for enemies, worms and woodchucks which “[…] nibble off the earliest tender leaves […] buds and young pods.” (Thoreau 106). The inner war has to be fought and it is of great importance that one watches his field and protects it against enemies (see Thoreau 106). Thoreau describes his labour as drudgery, he has a hard time, “[…] making the earth say beans instead of grass” (Thoreau 102).

Working all morning Thoreau tries to defy the weed that he compares to the Trojans, obviously it is a real war that has to be fought, and the enemies are not visible, but rather disguised as something good, and supported by the same energy as the attacked. Everyday Thoreau takes his hoe and turns the weed’s roots towards the sun, where they dry out and die. The same accounts for the person meditating, who is to take the hoe of distinctiveness and dig up all negative qualities buried in himself, thus bringing everything to the light of consciousness and by that extinguish it (see Thoreau 105). The digging and turning of the mould with the spade, “[…] gives it life […] attracted “vital spirits” from the air.” (Thoreau 105). According to Thoreau there is nothing better to do with one’s field than permanently dig it to bring all the rotten mould up to the sunlight, where it becomes vital again. By constantly digging up all the repressed parts of oneself one comes to life again and grows good fruit.

His flute has called and echoed over that water and he shapes the landscape of his dreams. Krishna’s flute represents God’s calling and Thoreau obviously takes up this Hindu image in order to represent his calling of nature to shape her. Nature not only meaning the real bean field at Walden, but also his own life, as well as life itself, as whatever changes in him will also show effects around him.

Thoreau finds a shrub oak on one end of his bean rows where he can rest in its shade, the shade of a tree representing the tree of life under which one can repose and recharge one’s batteries. At the other end of the field there grow blackberries which ripen after every completed round Thoreau makes (see Thoreau 100). This is a beautiful parable of how the energy that one gets in deep meditation, where one rests under the tree of life, lets the fruit on the other side of the field, our body and life, ripen and deepen its colour. Life gets deeper and sweeter if one brings the two sides of the field together. Thoreau names his field half-civilized “[…] the connecting link between wild and cultivated fields, as some states are civilized, and others savage or barbarous, […]” (Thoreau 102). Here on the one hand he speaks of the larger field, where God, the civilized and the material, the barbarous meet. On the other hand, the half-cultivated field represents Thoreau himself and man, with his thoughts already purified and his virtues in
opposition to those parts in him that are still savage, as he also mentions in Higher Laws. (see Thoreau 102)

If one meditates long and deep enough energy enters the body like rain, waters it and makes the dry soil more fertile for good thoughts and actions (see Thoreau 101). Thoreau also claims that it is important to harvest as early as possible (see Thoreau 106). The meditative person must know that in order to achieve a fully-cultivated field one must work hard, watch the enemies, but also harvest early, which means that one has to be content with each little step, whenever a new quality has ripened one should harvest and live it, make it part of one’s life (see Thoreau 106). “[…] for the earliest had grown considerably before the last were in the ground;” (Thoreau 100). Not all good qualities can be sowed at once, only one at a time will ripen and then can be included into one’s life.

“To me, away there in my bean-field at the other end of the town, the big guns sounded as if a puff ball had burst;” (Thoreau 104). And he goes further to write:

I felt proud to know that the liberties of Massachusetts and of our fatherland were in such safekeeping; and as I turned to my hoeing again I was filled with an inexpressible confidence, and pursued my labor cheerfully with a calm trust in the future. (Thoreau 104)

Thoreau is away in the field, obviously alluding to the larger field of knowledge and is only a witness of the war going on at some faraway place, only feeling some sort of itching. As soon as the sounds of war stop he feels perfectly at peace again and is full of trust and faith. For him, “These martial strains seemed as far away as Palestine, […]” (Thoreau 104). He feels detached from the war which is going on around him and inside of him, he is just an observer.

Detachment is a path and the aim of all three yoga paths, the path of karma yoga includes action, which is in conformity with one’s station in life, which is also determined by past lives. Karma yoga means to act according to one’s duty without any selfish motives, acting according to the universal will, which can only be achieved if the individual has become one with the infinite. Therefore effort must be made to reconnect with the absolute in order to fulfill one’s duty in harmony with the universe (see Prem 398-399). “Not that I wanted beans to eat, […] as some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day.” (see Thoreau 105).
Thoreau has no interest in his beans, he does not hoard them, he does not even eat them, he just exchanges them for rice. He is not attached to the fruit of his work he just does his labour because in a field one must work. The Gita also states that it is better to work than doing nothing, and that one should not cling to the fruit of one’s work. Whatever one does, it should be done without clinging to the results and as a sacrifice to God. Thoreau works for the field, which here again represents God.

The ancient poets believed husbandry to be sacred, but the people today think of their land as their property, they only want to possess and believe that it is them who are responsible for the harvest. Thoreau clearly states that it is not the farmer who is responsible for the field, there are much higher influences that care for it: “The broad field which I have looked at so long looks not to me as the principal cultivator, but away from me to influences more genial to it, which water and make it green.” (Thoreau 108).

We are not the ultimate ruler and possessors of our body and of our lives, there is a much higher power which controls us and nourishes us: “[…] the sun looks on our cultivated fields on the prairies and forests without distinction.” (Thoreau 108). Also, in the Gita, the sun shines on and illuminates the whole world with the same intensity, making no distinction whatsoever (see Friedrich 51).

Meditation is one of the major methods to cleanse the mind and purify one’s thoughts and emotions (see Prem 394). The railroad contributes to the exchange between north and south, raw materials are brought to the north where they are processed and new products are delivered to the south. Thoreau states that commerce is something natural and alert, it keeps men working with courage (see Thoreau 77). The connection between south and north can also be compared to the Hindu connection of the base chakra and the crown chakra, which needs to be activated, energy needs to be drawn upwards from the base chakra and new, enriched energy is spread throughout the whole body. The tracks can be compared to the spine which serves as the conductor for that energy exchange. The vital energy is the connection between matter and mind, one can only attain enlightenment by gaining control over this energy. By practicing certain breathing techniques the yogi can attain this state of control by awakening concentration, calmness, self-control and intuition. The train of thought and the distraction by the sensual organs needs to be stopped. Once the vital force can be controlled, the body is provided with cosmic energy, which stops the bodily decay and leads to awakening, the soul realizes its oneness with God and is able to see both the ocean and the waves of creation (see Paramahansa Yogananda 119-120). It seems that Thoreau himself feels as
a part of this ocean of vibrations when he describes the sounds he hears in the wood as all coming from the one *universal lyre modulated by the elements* (see Thoreau 80). The train’s whistle shows similarity to Krishna’s flute, which symbolized the soul’s call to the individual, the guidance one should follow. The metaphor of the flute is also used with John Farmer, who can be viewed as an everyman, he represents man. First he purifies his body by bathing and then sits down to recreate his mind. John Farmer is meditating and he is not paying attention to his thoughts anymore, so he is in deep meditation, this is the phase when one can hear God, one’s Soul speak. The sound of a flute is often used as a reference to God’s call. *Krishna* is depicted with a flute, which is a symbol suggesting to dance with him to the music of God. The yoga teachings say that a flute like sound is heard when the energy is centred in the spine and one is totally relaxed (see Paramahansa Yogananda 225). God – *Krishna* – the Self asks John why he is still living this mean life, and then he decides to “[…] practise some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with increasing respect.” (Thoreau 144).

On the other hand, Thoreau criticizes the railroad and its fastness, compares it to an iron horse stamping and snorting and shaking the earth with its feet, producing clouds of smoke and steam that do not bring fertility, but *put out the eyes and spoil ears* (see Thoreau 80). It symbolizes the restless world, the regulations of everyday life, where everything has to be done on schedule and where people lack the time for mindful living. The ego suffocates the soul and dims the sight of it. (see Paramahansa Yogananda 112). Thoreau feels disturbed in his meditation by the rattling of the train, in the afternoon he hears only some faint rattle of carriages. The subtle inner sounds can only be heard when the senses are withdrawn, in meditation one has to be careful not to be distracted by the sense organs, as they consume a lot of energy and deceive the eye and the ear, as they make one identify with the body and the sense objects (see Paramhansa Yogananda 118). In the beginning of the mediation practice one will hear many loud and low noises, which do not come from higher regions, but derive from the lower chakras. The ego forces are as boisterous and powerful as the iron horse and the wishes and temptations raised by it are as numberless as the goods transported by the train. The ego longs for fulfilment of all those wishes, just as the railway controls the people of Concord. People tend to sacrifice their true self to the unreal ego, which can never be satisfied, and forget to live their true potential. If the wishes cannot be fulfilled this way, another way is chosen, just as Thoreau writes that the people adapt to the schedule of the railway and take different routes than before. A lot of energy is needed
to keep the vital heat of the iron horse which travels without rest or slumber, the ego never sleeps, new wishes are produced constantly. Thoreau observes that the train regulates and clocks the whole country, and it is something we ourselves have constructed, the same applies to the ego, it rules the whole system, the individual as well as society and it is not something natural, but something constructed (see Thoreau 76-77). The request that men should make the elements their servants for noble ends can also be found in the Gita when Krisha tells Arjuna to fight Bhishma (the ego) and Duryodhana (material desire) and their armies of endless wishes and desires (see Paramahansa Yogananda 123).

In ‘The Sounds’ Thoreau describes how the goods are transported through the wood and he mentions cotton which finally is made into clothes which he calls its lowest condition to which it descends (see Thoreau 78). Humanity can be compared to cotton, the highest state being the raw material, union with god and people have reached their lowest state, fully distracted by matter and commerce.

When the trains are gone Thoreau can meditate uninterruptedly and the fish in the pond do not feel the rumbling anymore. The fish and water stand for the lower chakras, which regulate the circulation of blood and fluids in the body, when those chakras are distracted by outward stimulation the yogi cannot concentrate on his meditation and will not be successful. Only when the yogi can keep the lower energies under control he will find uninterrupted meditation and be able to hear the subtle sound current, the Shabd, which will take him to unknown inner regions (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 348). The dresses and clothes Thoreau talks about in chapter 4 might stand for outward distractions that keep men in their lowest state and make it impossible to reach the highest goal (see Thoreau 80).
6.2. Jnana Yoga, The Path Of Knowledge

*Jnana yoga* is the path of knowledge, the path of realization and insight. It is the philosophical path of the yoga system and leads to self-awareness and self-realization. This knowledge is not mere factual knowledge, it is much more a deep insight into the real nature of things, a deep understanding of the essence of the world and the universe and the connection between God and the world. It is considered to be the most difficult of the yoga paths, the fastest, but the one where the most discipline is needed to reach the goal. A very important fact about the *jnana* philosophy is that the world can be described in different ways, but in essence it is always one. (Prem 392)

The mind is determined by the interaction of the elements of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and only some individuals can walk the path of *jnana yoga* only. Most yoga systems usually combine *karma* and *jnana* yoga. In the *Gita* one can find two ways of knowledge, intellectual and intuitive. Inquiring the essence of the world intellectually one soon finds that one’s own identity is diffuse and that the gained knowledge, based on empirical data is not sufficient. In order to get knowledge of the phenomena one needs to be above them, therefore the senses need to be detached and knowledge has to be created at a stage higher then the sensory awareness. This knowledge is based on intuition, which can only be achieved, if the mind and the body are purified by concentration and discipline. (Prem 397) When the disciple arrives at this stage, he realizes his unity with the infinite and by that overcomes attachment to the world, which allows a life in self-realization. (Prem 398)

In chapter 7, *The Bean-Field*, Thoreau gives details about his raising of beans, he states that raising them makes him stronger, but that only Heaven knows why he does it. He describes the field, where he had already planted seven miles of beans. The field is a metaphor of the body, of the material world, but also for the total field only known by the supreme knower, by God (see Friedrich 49). Thoreau himself wants to gain knowledge “What shall I learn of beans?” (Thoreau 101), he wants to be part of this total field, wants to melt into that supreme knowledge. Just as the hawk is a “mote in heaven’s eye” (Thoreau 103), he would like to circle overhead and see the greater picture. “The hawk is the aerial brother of the wave which he sails over and surveys, those his perfect air-inflated wings answering to the elemental unfledged pinions of the sea.” (Thoreau 103). Just as the hawk is a part of the heaven, so is the wave a part of the great ocean, both heaven and the ocean are metaphors for infinity and for God. Thoreau
names the hawk the wave’s brother and by that connects heaven and earth as both a part of that infinity. He clearly shows that everything is intertwined, even the hen-hawks approaching and leaving one another are connected to his thoughts (see Thoreau 103).

Given the fact that empirical knowledge is not acknowledged as sufficient knowledge, knowledge found in books cannot be seen as producing insight into the true nature of things as well. Scriptures can only lead to insight, if intuition is used to interpret what has been read.

Thoreau read most of the Indian and ancient Greek and Latin classics because he was convinced that a good student has to study the noble thoughts of the great thinkers of history. Thoreau distinguishes between ‘our mother tongue’, which he calls the spoken language, in a way a ‘brutish dialect’, as he calls it, that is learned unconsciously, and the mature version, which he calls ‘the father tongue’, a selective and pure language that needs to be learned and is only used in literature. The old languages such as Latin and Greek are an antique treasure, now only read by a few scholars. Thoreau believes that sacred and philosophical scriptures were written in a language that is superior to the spoken language, a language that speaks to the mind and heart of those who can understand them, in any age. Those books enlighten the reader and are the wealth of man’s cultural heritage. However, it is not enough just to read those books, as a layman would read the stars; great works need to be read by great minds, as an intellectual challenge and exercise (see Thoreau 68). Reading gives orientation, as ancient books answer current questions, reveal and explain miracles, each in their way. Thoreau criticizes that more money is spent on bodily treatments than on mental training and spiritual progress. New England should be taught by wise men and have villages of noble, moral and wise men, who cross the gulf of ignorance, instead of noblemen (see Thoreau 72).

It is of great importance to read classics and philosophical works, but one can never gain real knowledge from books or society alone, the only way to come to real wisdom is by experience, i.e. by living in the present and fully experiencing what is happening this very moment. One cannot derive a living experience from books, one has to experience life in order to find its truth. Thoreau writes in Walden that he did not read the first year, he hoed beans, he experienced the land he was cultivating, he sat in the woods and listened to the birds and the sound of the wind, he often just sat in front of his hut and lived the moment. “There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present day to any work, whether of the head or the hands.” (Thoreau 72).
Thoreau took his morning bath and enjoyed the solitude and stillness, for him those days were like contemplation and he even compares it to the meditation of the Orientals. This time of silence and living in the divine presence made him grow “like corn in the night” (Thoreau 73). His inner character could grow in this silence, surrounded only by mother nature and her calming sounds. We find Thoreau surrounded by many birds, not singing like them, but feeling silent joy deep inside. The bird as the symbol of the soul sings in the hickory bush and leads Thoreau into a silent contemplation, the soul realizes that past, present and future do not exist and are of no importance, the only important time is the present moment and by doing nothing Thoreau dives deep into the present and becomes one with nature. He compares himself to the flowers and the birds, which fully live the moment without worrying about the future or pondering about the past. Most people, busy distracting themselves from what is inside them, would call this laziness, but one has to find what one needs in oneself and not somewhere outside (see Thoreau 73).

Having found that inner source, life itself becomes blissful and is apprehended anew every moment, one’s genius gives incessantly fresh impulses and following it everything becomes a kind of meditation, a way to meet the moment. No matter if one cleans the floor and moves the furniture outside, every work can be a kind of meditation. Thoreau enjoys the sun shining on his furniture and realizes that life is pulsating everywhere, in the table, in the chair and in the trees and birds around his house (see Thoreau 74). He describes nature in detail, one feels the attention he must have been paying to each moment, every detail was noticed by him and every tree and bird was of great importance. Thoreau describes nature like a painting, every sound and sight left an imprint on his mind and this is only possible if one is absolutely present, without any distraction of thoughts and feelings. Hindu philosophy states that a calm mind and calm emotions are the most important prerequisites for enlightenment, since only in the state of perfect calm is one able to see behind the veil of forms and touch the ocean of truth. Thoreau himself is on the yoga path at Walden Pond, he is a disciple in search for the truth hidden underneath the visible world.
6.3. Bhakti Yoga, Faith and Devotion

*Bhakti yoga* is the way of devotion, meaning the path of full surrender to a deity, one’s entire emotions are directed towards the loving attachment to God. It is less concerned with rituals and more with the individual devotion to God, an individual and playful way of worshipping is in the foreground, as opposed to the ritualised actions of the path of *karmayoga* (see Potter 40). *Bhakti* refers to an intense love of God and the world. As the world is seen as being real, the whole world is worshipped by worshipping the one chosen deity. *Prakrti*, Mother Nature, is perceived as the creator of the *purusas*, the living beings, and they are all eternal, as they are part of God, not created by him (see Kumar 369). *Prakrti* is the cause of the universe, without it no entities could exist, only spirit is independent of nature. Space and time are also seen as aspects of nature and, therefore, not independent entities. The physical universe is a combination of *sattvic, rajasic* and *tattvic* powers, the *gunas*.

*Prakrti*, meaning the enjoyed, therefore reveals itself to the *purusas*, the enjoyer, through the combination of the different qualities, the *gunas*. *Prakrti* is active, whereas the *purusas* are seen as passive, there are many different characters and gifts and therefore *purusas* are many with one common characteristic, their spiritual nature, while *prakrti* is only one (see Kumar 373). The Svetasvatara Upanishad states:

One should know nature (prakrti) as the artifice, the great lord as the artificer, and the whole world as pervaded by beings that are parts of him. By discerning the one who stands over every womb, in whom all this is gathered together, the lord, the boon-granter, the worshipful god, one attains surpassing peace.(Svetasvatara Upanishad 4, 10-11)

The aim of *bhakti yoga* is the spirit’s liberation from the body, which occurs due to false identification with *prakrti*, hence the practice of yoga should lead to knowledge and independence. Yoga accepts three sources of knowledge, which are perception, inference, and scripture, whereas yoga always includes a practical way of attaining knowledge, and individual abilities are more important than universal knowledge (see Kumar 370).

*Bhakti* includes a personal experience of God, it is not sufficient to merely rely on second hand knowledge and scriptures, one needs to experience by oneself in order to really gain spiritual knowledge, which can liberate one’s spirit. Plants are an often used symbol in the Hindu Scriptures, standing for the success one gains for living a devoted
and good life, the fruits representing the rewards of good conduct, just as the farmer reaps what he sowed, the spiritual person reaps the success of his efforts, “One who is engaged in (proper) conduct is traditionally said to enjoy the full fruit.” (The Laws of Manu 1.109) No, this is like the Upanishads

Thoreau clearly states that in chapter 9, The Ponds, where he writes that the fruits of the huckleberry will only present their true flavour to those who pick it themselves in the hills. Therefore the fruits one buys in the market, symbolizing knowledge gained by others, can never fulfil the spirit’s longing. “The ambrosial and essential part of the fruit” (Thoreau 113), Thoreau states, can never be transported to a different place, it needs to be eaten right away, only then can it nourish and fill the person with its nectar of knowledge. One also needs to pluck the berries oneself, knowledge is no real knowledge if it was not produced by the person himself, in order to gain knowledge one needs to experience different situations, one needs to put some effort into it. Knowledge most of the time does not come pre-picked by somebody else, it is the fruit we harvest after some time of work (see Thoreau 112-113). Knowledge is also not for those who only want it to have something to boast with, it is not thought for the market, but for oneself and one’s liberation out of illusion. Spiritual knowledge cannot be sold, or passed on, it must be attained through spiritual practice and devotion. Also those who walk around presenting themselves as spiritual and judging those without knowledge are not really filled with spiritual knowledge and love, “[...] nor to him who raises them for the market. There is but one way to obtain it, yet few take that way.” (Thoreau 112). Krishna says the same in the Gita, only few make the effort to really walk into the woods and pick the fruit of wisdom and knowledge themselves, most of them are satisfied with hollow rituals and reading scriptures without real understanding, they believe that religiousness will bring them to the final goal, but forget that only by acting and searching for the truth oneself will finally lead there. The individual will never be able to know, only if the ego is dropped the knowledge of the universe can float through, like the ambrosia of the huckleberry, as long as people think they can buy this knowledge or boast with it, they are caught in their ego and, therefore, will never attain real knowledge. Truth only descends into an empty mind (see Osho 29-36). Going to the woods and picking huckleberries takes time and, therefore, many people prefer buying them at the market, which is much more convenient and faster, one needs to realize though, that knowledge can not be obtained on the fast track, real knowledge needs time; haste cannot create knowledge, if we haste through our experiences we will not learn from them. Only by taking our time, by reflecting, can we learn and improve.
The huckleberries are armed with little thorns, which hurt when we pluck the fruits, but in the end we harvest the sweet taste of knowledge and transformation. In order to transcend, one needs to go through conflict and hardship, and it is essential that one acknowledges the dilemmas one faces on the way, for only by facing and experiencing everything one will be allowed to pick the fruit of knowledge (see Osho 65). It is the transformation that is painted by Thoreau’s metaphor of the huckleberry, one needs to walk into the woods, face one’s fears and not be deterred by the thorns of the bush, but touch them and reach for the sweet fruits. The thorns also symbolize the distraction caused by the senses, which are faced when sitting in meditation, the senses always send signals to the brain, disturbing the calm, one feels an itching or pain, one needs to move, the distractions are manifold. In order to finally get to the sweet fruit it is important to ignore the stitches and the itching and go on plucking, the same is true of successful meditation. One will not succeed if one is not determined to get the fruit, one must ignore the distractions of the senses and of the mind and stay focused on the goal. Nobody can do these steps for oneself, as long as one lets others do the picking and prefers second hand knowledge, one will never enjoy the real taste of transformation, one will only have a rational idea of how it could taste, just as one cannot tell how a fruit tastes as long as one has not tried it.

Only meditation can awaken the life force, the *soma*. The *Bhagavad Gita* gives advice on how to meditate properly, stating that one needs to retire from the world regularly to a quiet place, in *Walden* this quiet place is the wood. The *Gita* also explains all the difficulties that may arise while mediating, how often one will find oneself distracted by thoughts or physical sensations, which in *Walden* are represented by the thorns. No efforts are futile, the least step into meditation, into the woods, will be rewarded with some fruits, with some positive insight (see Paramahansa Yogananda 328) The practicing person will find that pain, lust, heat and cold only arise because of the senses’ contact with the world, they all have a beginning and an end, they are evanescent and do not affect the essence of the soul. Once meditation has become part of one’s life, the thorns function as companions to a higher awareness of oneself, and one will be capable of enduring them with a joyful heart (see Paramahansa Yogananda 242).

The western world tends to neglect and eliminate everything that creates suffering. People prefer to buy their huckleberries without thorns, already prepared for instant eating. People undertake lots of efforts and spend huge amounts of money in order to remove inconveniences, but they are not ready to spend some time on meditation in
order to elevate themselves above all those dualistic feelings (see Paramahansa Yogananda 243)

The *Gita*, in chapter 6, states “The higher self of a tranquil man whose self is mastered is perfectly poised in cold or heat, joy or suffering, honour or contempt.” (BG 6.7).

Already plucked huckleberries do not lead to this goal, self-realisation can only be gained by oneself. Thoreau hoed the fruits himself, he meditated in the woods and after that enjoyed the surrounding, for which he had gained a new and deep feeling. The way he describes the woods, the water and the animals around him, one realizes that his meditation had made him more sensitive to the surrounding energies (see Thoreau 113). After his meditation Thoreau would go to the pond and play his flute, again a symbol for Krishna, who is usually depicted playing the flute, symbolizing the soul calling back all its energies, or the spine, where *idala* and *pingala*, the female and male energy channels move upwards to merge in the third eye. Thoreau obviously felt the call of his soul and had set the energies into an upward motion. His playing the flute would attract fish, just as the calling of the soul attracts all the energies that were scattered before and focuses them on one point. The moon is travelling over the pond, reflecting in its ripples (see Thoreau 113). The moon, *chandra*, symbolizes the emotions and is the ruler of the watery realms and also of the plants and vegetation since it is connected to the Vedic deity of *Soma*. Water in itself is sacred in Hinduism, it is supposed to have cleansing powers and, therefore, bathing in it leads to purity, physical and emotional. Water also symbolizes the ocean of life and ourselves, where every action and thought produces ripples, some small and some as big as waves. The purer one gets in one’s actions, thoughts and emotions the smoother the water gets and the better it can reflect the moon and the sun, representing also the soul. The ripples also stand for the soul’s ability to perceive all the different stages of consciousness, floating in the river of time, past, present and future (see Paramahansa Yogananda 241). “That is fire, that is the sun, that is air, that is the moon likewise: that is the pure, that is Brahman, that is water, that is Prajapati.” (Svetasvatara Upanishad book 6, 2).

Thoreau, in his chapter *The Ponds*, writes about the moon mirroring in the pond, the flute, which needs air to create sound, the whistling, and the fire he makes next to the shore. The yogi, pulling up his energies through the channel in the spine, realizes the primordial laws of nature and starts to dissolve the coarser ones. The yogi changes the

19 http://hinduism.about.com/od/artculture/a/sacred_symbols_4.htm
consciousness of earth vibration into the consciousness of water vibration, and this again into the consciousness of air vibration. Air vibration is transformed into the consciousness of ether, and this again is turned into the consciousness of human mind, *manas*, which again changes into the consciousness of discrimination, *buddhi*. Following this way of dissolving and changing all the 24 natural laws the yogi finally merges with the cosmic power ‘OM’ and becomes one with it (see Paramahansa Yogananda 325). Thoreau wonderfully describes this process in chapter 9, when he writes about making a fire next to the shore, throwing burning brands into the air, which soon after fall into the water and create vapour and soon they stand in darkness, all the impressions have merged to a pitch black, and again to a whistling tune he follows his way home to a sound which could be ‘OM’ (see Thoreau 113).

Thoreau goes fishing by moonlight, anchored in forty feet of water and surrounded by owls and foxes, again, the lake in Hinduism signifies a higher consciousness and purity, water also stands for a new beginning, as it is the first element a foetus swims in, water flows freely, therefore it also represents the life forces and energies that should flow freely (see Chopra 44). The night represents a time of development and change, it has the power of transformation and initiation. During the night all activities come to a rest, the sky is clear and the air vibrant with power, the realities of the day slowly vanish and a new state of mind is possible, the night gives birth to new light and day, it creates the possibility of change and to see things in a new light. *Vedic philosophy* claims that transitional moments carry immense amounts of high quality *prana*, which can transfer our energies and awareness to a higher level (see Chopra 61). Thoreau goes fishing by night, he uses the night time to think about, “cosmogonial themes in other spheres” (Thoreau 114). He is deeply rooted in his emotions, in his soul, represented by the lake and on the other hand he is reasoning about existence, and from time to time some fish bring him back to the moment and link him to nature again.

“It seemed as if I might cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook.” (Thoreau 114). The most important exercise in meditation is to connect the root chakra to the third eye or the chakras above, when the kundalini is brought upwards it moves from the root chakra to the third eye, which in Walden is symbolized by the fishing rod linking the lake with the sky. The lake and nature stand for the life force, the root chakra and the sky represent higher states of awareness, which need to be linked and merged in meditation. The rod can also be seen as an invisible connecting line, representing the spine, with Thoreau’s boat floating in the middle, representing the heart.
chakra, from where he sends out his line down the lake and another line upwards into the sky, receiving energy from both ends. Thoreau is in deep meditation, he has restricted his senses, he sits in a pure place and has his mind focused on the stars or the nature surrounding him, he is fully present in the moment, not making future plans, or remembering past events. He is receiving nature and her energies, he is totally centred and content within the self. Thoreau seems to feel absolute joy in his boat, floating in the middle, he is sitting in the eye of the storm, where there is peace and calm, only sometimes he feels a slight breeze and vibration, indicating moving life around him (see Thoreau 114). A comparison might be made with Shvetashvatara Upanishad II:

> Keeping the body straight, its three parts upright,  
> Causing the senses by mind to enter the heart,  
> By the boat of Brahman the wise one should cross over  
> All terrifying floods.  
> (Shvetashvatara Upanishad II, 8)

The Gita, in chapter 6, explains exactly what Thoreau is describing in his chapter The Pond. For Thoreau everything has become divine. The Gita states:

> He who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me will not be lost to me,  
> and I will not be lost to him.  
> I exist in all creatures, so the disciplined man devoted to me grasps the oneness of life; wherever he is, he is in me. (BG ch6, 30-31)

Walden becomes something special to Thoreau, because he takes his time to look deep into its wonders, he notices its different colours every day changing in the seasons, Walden Pond shows a range of colours from green, blue to yellow, alternating with the weather. Change is part of the great plan, it forms duality, nothing lasts forever, life changes as quickly as Walden Pond changes its colours, people may be confused about the need for change but in the end it only leads life and its individuals to higher stages of development. Krishna does not distinguish between good and bad, neither is the destruction of lives bad nor is anything else good, it all leads to one end, which is development of the soul. The only thing that is unchanging is Brahma itself (see Paramahansa Yogananda 1010). Only when one can watch change as Thoreau does with Walden Pond, without any judgement, resentment or sadness, only then will one realize the subtle, unchanging energy behind all the external manifestations.
The Shvetashvatara Upanishad states:

Knowing him, subtler than the subtle in the midst of the throng,
Many-formed creator of all,
One enfolder of all, Shiva,
One attains surpassing peace.
(Shvetashvatara Upanishad IV, 14)

Thoreau dives into this pond, he merges with its energies. His description of the scenery of Walden Pond and its surroundings is the best set-up for meditation in itself. Thoreau is focused on nature, he is open to the moment and everything it contains. Thoreau hears every bird, every branch crack, he notices the ripples, the colours, the depths of the water and even its bottom, the clouds in the sky and the different reflections of the light (see Thoreau 114-115). When reading this passage one gets the impression that Thoreau and Walden have become one, which is the aim of meditation. Bhakti yoga means total devotion to the divinity, and Thoreau is absolutely devoted to Walden and nature in this chapter. As the Shvetashvatara Upanishad puts it:

To the god who is in fire, in water,
Who has entered the whole world
Who is in plants, in trees-
To the god be praised, be praised.
(Shvetashvatara Upanishad II, 17)

In this chapter of Walden, the pond becomes alive, it is a representative of Brahma, Thoreau describes every detail and one gets the impression that everything around him is sacred. Thoreau describes the way a body looks when bathing in Walden Pond, taking the colour of white alabaster and reflecting a crystalline purity (see Thoreau 115). Bathing in the universal ocean of knowledge, in oneness, a person becomes pure and crystalline, they expand themselves becoming one with the source of life: “I am the ocean of lakes” (BG ch10, 24).

White includes everything, it is perfection, knowledge itself. A person meditating regularly, clears his aura which will finally enlarge more and more until he becomes one with his surroundings and sees everything in himself, just as Arjuna sees the whole world in front of him in chapter eleven of the Gita. Arjuna dives into the universe, he realizes that all its different parts are one, becoming one with the timeless spirit, the knower and what is to be known (see BG ch11, 38). Such a deep vision can only be attained by bhakti. Physically speaking, white is a mixture of all colours, therefore it contains the qualities of all its different parts. In Hinduism it stands for peace, knowledge, purity and cleanliness. One also associates the upper caste, the Brahmins,
and Saraswati with the colour white, Saraswati always being painted in white robes, sitting on a white lotus. White is also worn when mourning.

7. Thoreau’s Success

Thoreau left Walden Pond after 3 years and one can say that this period of living so close to and with nature totally changed the way he perceived life. He was already critical of society and its laws before he left to live in the woods, but now one can sense a strong spiritual note to it. It seems as if Thoreau had penetrated deeply into himself and really felt oneness with the universe and its creator. When he says “The universe is wider than our views of it” (Thoreau 207), he can only claim that because he had experienced it himself. He criticises that mankind spends so much time on exploring foreign countries and finds enjoyment in shooting exotic animals far away in Africa, instead of exploring themselves and shooting their egocentric minds (see Thoreau 207). Thoreau advises his readers to look inside, and explore the thousand undiscovered regions one will face there, and by doing so become an expert of oneself. It is not so important to know everything about the outer world and to have a fully charted map, much more should we try to travel our inner regions and carefully draw a map of them. In, “Explore your own higher latitudes.” (Thoreau 207) the reader is confronted with the most significant wisdom of Hinduism and Buddhism, the importance of knowing oneself and who one really is, namely a soul, a part of Brahma. There are many layers of consciousness to be explored on the journey to our true nature, a change of thought as well as of behaviour might be needed, and only those who don’t have any self-respect give up this sacred journey and sacrifice it to something less important. Most people prefer worldly matters and love success and material possessions, they sacrifice their souls for the achievement of worldly issues. As Thoreau puts it “They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay.” (Thoreau 207). The animating spirit can only be found by meditation wherein one travels deep into one’s soul, exploring many unknown regions. This way of meditation and getting to know oneself is a tough undertaking, though. Thoreau states that it is much easier to sail the world than to sail one’s own inner seas (see Thoreau 208). As long as people only look for happiness on the outside, they will only find superficial and short satisfaction, countries will be explored, roads built and treasures

taken home, but these treasures are nothing compared to those found in meditation, whatever people strive for, is what they will get in the end: “As one acts, as one behaves, so does one become” and “He, with his action is attached to that same mark to which his mind is bound” (*Brhadaranyaka Upanishad IV.4*).

“Explore thyself” (Thoreau 208), you will become what you focus on, therefore the focus should be within, if self-realization is the aim, the way mentioned again is meditation, focussing on the third eye.

Thoreau clearly states that once one is in contact with one’s soul the laws of society become less important and one should feel bound more to the inner sacred laws, which will only oppose unjust governments. Once connected with the true soul one does not act according to society in order to be judged well, rather one follows one’s inner attitudes and feelings to express oneself (see Thoreau 208).

Thoreau left Walden Pond because he felt it was time to go, it was his feeling that it was best to do something different, and he followed this inner urge. Human beings have a disposition to routine, we tend to follow the same track over and over again, never even thinking of different ways. After the few years Thoreau had spent at the lake one could already notice deep tracks where he had always walked, and he mentions that even years later the paths were still visible (see Thoreau 209). It is easier to follow a beaten track than to find one for ourselves, where we might have to do all the work in order to get through, but even if we preferred a different route, people would tend to use predefined paths. Thoreau compares the tracks on the ground with the paths of the mind, both are easily formed and once walked on, constitute a prescribed path for the following times, this is how tradition works. Little tracks have been turned into main roads on which everyone will walk, and on which most people forget that they would rather walk in different direction than the road leads to, but they don’t know how to escape. Thoreau found his way, he climbed the “deck of the world” (Thoreau 209) by meditation, he found higher regions within himself, and different paths to be walked, and he clearly states that he would never want to go back again. He enjoys the view from the top, the moon he sees, symbolizing his soul. Once the soul has been explored, God has been found in oneself, one can also see God outside and by that live one’s soul and one’s dreams, because one is no longer subject to worldly laws, but universal laws guide the newly found life. Life will get simpler and less complex and worldly troubles will be accepted with equanimity. Dreams are to be lived, and with the right focus and universal support they probably can be achieved, one simply needs to trust in the combination of one’s own powers and those of the universe (see Thoreau 209). One
should not behave and speak in order to be understood by other people, nature is the home of so many different creatures, all of them having a right to existence, therefore one should act without limitations and speak the truth (see Thoreau 209). These passages are in one with the first path of the Eight-Fold Path of yoga, which is restraint, not only meaning to reduce one’s property and not taking anything which is not given, but also including ahimsa, kindness, good will for all living beings, and truthfulness in speech and in action; hypocrisy, flattery and untruthfulness injure people and society and as such are falsehoods (see Prem 393).

Thoreau definitely feels awakened, he feels he has reached a new level of existence, a more alert and receptive state, which enables him to see beyond the boundaries of customs, acknowledging all the different facets of nature. He encourages his readers to awaken too, to open up to new experiences, to find new realms inside them and to live their dreams on the foundation of universal trust. He stands up for true speech, which is one of the core principles in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Thoreau has heard the inner music “Who that has heard a strain of music […]” (Thoreau 210), the Shabd, celestial music, the divine word, which cannot be heard by the ear, nor can it be spoken of properly, as words fail to describe it. For those who hear it, it transcends all limitation and dependence, as it permeates the whole creation it dissolves duality (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 341-342). This celestial music changes the whole being, one wishes to act and speak the truth, one’s own experienced truth. Bhakti yoga also includes kirtan, the singing of devotional songs, if one acts and speaks the truth, one’s whole life becomes a kirtan in praise of our soul and God. If we listen to our soul and then act accordingly, that is true bhakti and true kirtan (see Radha Soami Satsang Beas 357). Most people are asleep most of the time, therefore commonsense cannot be a guideline for someone who has been awakened. Thoreau states that his fellow people would even find something wrong in a sunrise, if they ever got up as early as to see one. The sunrise is a widely used symbol for awakening one’s mind and Thoreau claims that most people would even find something to criticise about awakening and self-realisation, as it does not follow fixed rules, but leaves room for many paths. Just as they are irritated by writings that allow more than one interpretation, as for example, Kabir, who is mentioned in Walden, they are irritated by people whose actions can not be interpreted on the basis of tradition, or which break the rule of conformity. Instead of the potato rot, Thoreau claims that the brain rot should be healed, insinuating that the brain should be used for something greater, one should not
content oneself with the mist, but strive to go beyond it and see the blue ether above (see Thoreau 210). Thoreau has experienced meditation and knows how difficult it is to make progress, one is successful at first, but soon there come hindrances, thoughts, sensations or emotions, which disturb the individual, many give up and stop at this point. However, it is important that one overcomes these initial problems and strives for higher realms inside, purity of thought is to be reached. The way we think colours our world, therefore the mind needs purification in order to see the world from above, from the top of the mountain, and get a clearer picture of it.

Thoreau writes that everyone should mind his own business and become the best of what he can be, this view is also stated in the *Maitri Upanishad*, “And this is the remedy for the elemental self: study of the Veda, practicing one’s own dharma, and walking according to one’s own stage in life.” (Maitri Upanishad IV.3). Man is not supposed to do what tradition asks of him, nor, what other men do around him, he should listen to his inner voice and act accordingly (see Thoreau 210). One can only experience and express the self, if one dares to live it, every person has his rhythm, just as nature has her seasons, neither can one slow down nature, nor can one accelerate it, the fruit ripens, when its time has come and when the circumstances are perfect. Thoreau learned that everything in this world has a time, once one lives so close to nature these universal laws become clear again. The same is true for meditation, it makes no sense to pretend having reached the aim, when in reality one has not, one cannot force progress in life, nor in meditation, success needs time, effort and the right conditions, and then it will come all by itself, and it will be real success, not just a *heaven of blue glass*. (see Thoreau 211). The artist mentioned in Walden, who neglected time because he wanted to create something perfect, and the prerequisite for that was no time pressure at all, he thought, actually succeeded in keeping time out of his work. Thoreau mentions that Brahma had slept and awoken, the world had been dissolved and created anew, many times, but the artist was still working on his perfect staff. When the staff was finished, it turned out to be the most perfect creation, which had impact on the whole of creation, and that for him no time had passed at all (see Thoreau 211). The artist did exactly what he had to do at that time, and therefore he dissolved time and space around him, his work was not an action out of selfish desire, but it was an act of selfless creation, he expressed his inner truth, and this created a perfect outcome. “Brahma had awoken and slumbered many times.” (Thoreau 211). One day of *Brahma, a kalpa*, equals one thousand *yugas*, a *yuga* being an age with specific characteristics, four *yugas* make up a circle called divya-yuga. A day and a night of Brahma therefore are two *kalpas*. The
*divya-yuga* has a length of 4,320,000 years. One life of *Brahma* lasts one hundred years of his time, which means 72,000 kalpas, and at the end of one life all the worlds are completely dissolved and the reincarnation circle is cut.\(^{21}\) Each *yuga* supports a specific way of self-realization.

The first *yuga* is the *sattya yuga*, also called the golden age, and the supported technique of self-realization is meditation on *Vishnu*. The *tretra yuga*, or also called the silver age and the best way to gain liberation is to perform sacrifices. The food qualities of the golden age slowly decrease in the *tretra yuga*. In the *dvapara yuga*, the bronze age, the individual is supposed to worship deities in temples, and it is an age where the good qualities have already decreased to a half. The last yuga, is called the *kali yuga*, it is the iron age and deceit and falsehood are prevalent. People are only 25% aware of their origin and the best way for salvation is the chanting of holy names.\(^ {22}\)

There are different views on how to calculate the *yugas*, and which we are momentarily in, but as this is not of great importance to the topic a rough introduction to the four *yugas* and their meanings will suffice here.

Thoreau states that most of the time people do not live how they feel, but fulfil positions, which they have been put in by society. We do that “through an infirmity of our natures” (Thoreau 212) and bear the situation, which splits us into two, one part of us wanting to do something different, the other part trying to fulfil our duty (see Thoreau 212). There are only two ways out of this misery, either we can change the situation and do what we would like to do, or we can accept the situation and put our soul into it, because it is where the universe has put us right now, and it is up to us to make the best out of it, to make it a pure creation, to “meet life and live it” (Thoreau 212). One can find the negative everywhere, if one is looking for it, on the contrary, the positive is all around as well, the sun shines the same everywhere, if one is poor or rich, beauty can be seen everywhere, nature is the same for everyone, the only difference is made by the personal perception. It is not the exterior environment that makes a person happy, they can still be upset about the storm outside, or the rain and cold, if their minds are not balanced; poor people with a pure mind, however, can enjoy the best lives. It is not so much about changing our surroundings and situations, about getting new things and doing something different, the task is to change the way we view our lives: “Things do not change; we change.” (see Thoreau 212). We are what we think and we

\(^{21}\) [http://baharna.com/karma/yuga.htm.]

\(^{22}\) [http://www.harekrishnatemple.com/chapter19.html.]
experience what we think, Thoreau claims that one could take away everything from him, as long as he has his thoughts, the world will be as large as before. One needs to be truthful to his own thoughts, not subordinate them to a society of sleepers, if one has found one’s truth, then one must live it, only by that can God notice that one is determined. If one subordinates oneself to society’s influence and tries to be something else just to please others and to be someone important, for a yogi that is considered falsehood, as one pretends and deceives others (see Kumar 393).

Right thought and right action are the only truthful way, if the thoughts and actions are not in accordance, truthfulness is not lived. Only when we can admit our unimportance, when we are humble, we will see our true nature and can free ourselves from falsehood: “Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights.” (Thoreau 212). Thoreau makes clear that the more we possess and the more we try to be someone different, the more we distance ourselves from the most precious treasure in life, ourselves. The less one owns, the more one can look at life as such, one is not distracted, by this book, and that new dress, rather life is the most exciting thing to be explored. Therefore the poor have easier access to their selves and to life as such: “It is life near the bone where it is sweetest.” (see Thoreau 213). The less one accumulates around oneself, the more one lives the true and sweet life, as Thoreau calls it, money can only buy redundant means, it only takes one away from the core of life, and it can never buy the treasure of the soul. Thoreau already mentioned that earlier in Walden, when he said that he wanted to live life to the hilt and suck the marrow out of it (see Thoreau 59)

He has definitely found something of greater importance than society and its entertainment, for him the inside of a person counts more than what they represent outwardly. Thoreau has found his path and he is determined to walk it, no one can keep him from it, he has seen through the swamps of society and he knows that most things said and done are not based on truth, but on leaving outer impressions. He compares this to a swamp, one has sink a long way until one reaches hard ground, just as one needs to go through all the superficialities of society before one finds the core of the individuals. It is clearly stated that one should not rely on superficialities, neither in other people, nor in oneself. We are not here to deceive others and ourselves, we are here to express our true nature, to be part of this creation, our works should be like, “[...] another rivet in the machine of the universe [...]” (Thoreau 214).

Thoreau became detached from society, he experienced something so much deeper and more fulfilling, living alone in the woods that he could not bear the superficiality of
his fellow people any longer. When sitting together drinking wine, he thinks of a wine that is much older and purer, which cannot be bought, everyday talk has become superficial to him compared to as he had talked to the nature surrounding him, and the voice inside him, life has changed and issues of great importance to the rest of the world have no meaning to him anymore (see Thoreau 214). He would rather prefer the company of a man living in a cave, having experienced the same as he had than sharing a table with abundant food and cold hosts who do not express themselves but only play a social role. These people are cold as ice, because their inner fire is not burning, they have lost touch with themselves and truth, permanently trying to belong to the one group of society and differentiate from another: “But a goose is still a goose, dress it as you will.” (see Thoreau 213). For Thoreau neither the outward appearance, nor the status of a person are important, the wise man knows that in reality we are all the same:

Learned men see with an equal eye
A scholarly and dignified priest,
A cow, an elephant, a dog,
And even an outcaste scavenger.
(BGV.18)

Thoreau claims that the human race still slumbers, for it is still spring time and most humans still need to slowly awake under the warm sun. On the surface we pretend to be wise and learned, with a well established-system, but underneath we are still asleep and have not awoken to life yet (see Thoreau 214). Thoreau here again alludes to the Yugas of Indian philosophy, as already mentioned above. Stating that humankind was in its spring might suggest that Thoreau was talking about the dvapara yuga and not the kali yuga, though. He admits that we are highly intelligent beings, and we must only remind ourselves of the even higher intelligence above us and reconnect with this huge ocean of power, which brings about creativity. Life is compared to a river, sometimes flooding the land and sometimes totally drying out, but life always springs forth again, even after long dry periods, the same life is buried in each individual and no matter how long the drought has taken, as soon as the first drop of water touches the soil, life awakens again.

People can live without remembrance of their true self for a long time, they may dry out and walk around half asleep, but as soon as their soul gets touched only a little, they will slowly reawaken. Thoreau uses the metaphor of the egg buried under layers, the egg plays an important role in the creation of the world in Hindu philosophy, it is said that the world was created out of a golden egg (see Thoreau 215). It is the cosmic egg of creation that lies buried in all of us, waiting for the right moment to be hatched. We
bury our eggs under the pressures of society, not remembering the true essence of our souls, but when the time is ripe, the tree will grow, blossom and bear fruits, and the individual will at last be able “to enjoy its perfect summer life at last.” (Thoreau 216). Summer stands for the golden phase, for the ripening and harvesting of our actions and thoughts, the sun stands high in the sky in summer, just as the soul is clearly visible to those who are connected with it. The last few sentences of this chapter are a hymn to the liberated life, Thoreau knows that not everyone will reach this state soon, but he dreams of a morning, which will not end, just as the time did not pass with the artist who made his perfect creation, time for the awoken individual does not pass, time and space, duality have dissolved. Being one with the essence of being, one with God, there is no feeling of time, only absolute bliss and love. “The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us.” (see Thoreau 216). In the Gita we also read that what is darkness for the sleeping is light for the awoken and vice versa. “Such a sage awakes to light in the night of all creatures. That which the world calls day is the night of ignorance to the wise.” (BG II.69). Only a day on which we walk the path towards awakening is a day which sees dawn, and Thoreau states that there are many days which are still awaiting their dawn, as most days pass without any moments of remembrance of the divine. According to Thoreau, once one has given dawn to his days, there will follow a much brighter day, once on the path of meditation and reconnection, one will find lights inside that shine even brighter than the sun (see Thoreau 216).
8. Conclusion

The starting question of this thesis was if Thoreau’s time at Walden Pond can be read in terms of a yogic path. After all the research and the comparative work between Walden and the Hindu scriptures used, this question must be answered positively. One can see Thoreau’s progress and change over the course of time, and his conclusion clearly shows that he became a different person, someone who practiced what he had read before, and who attained not only knowledge of the theory, but also experienced the truth. He does no longer talk about something he read somewhere in the *Gita*, he gained the insights of the *Gita*, as he became Arjuna, Krishna’s disciple:

When a man finds delight
Within himself and feels inner joy
And pure contentment in himself,
There is nothing more to be done.
(BG III.17)

Thoreau reached this advanced stage, where he is fully content with himself. He does not depend on society to define his identity, nor is his self based on his actions or his speech. According to the *Bahagavad Gita* he reached a stage where nothing else needs to be done. He also follows the rule that the teachings and the insight gained should not be told to people who cannot comprehend it and who do not desire to learn about it. He rather accepts his fellow beings the way they are, being aware that every individual has their own pace and their own time to develop certain features:

Krishna, my delusion is destroyed,
And by your grace I have regained memory;
I stand here, my doubt dispelled,
Ready to act on your words.
(BG XVIII.73)

These are Arjuna’s words in the eighteenth chapter of the *Gita*, and they sound very much like Thoreau’s insights, both have found the source of their being, the source of their power and actions and both act according to this source now. Just as the *Gita* ends in an expression of amazement by Sanjaya, Thoreau ends his Walden with a paragraph that sounds like a hymn of hope. The *Gita* concludes with the knowledge that as long as Krishna and Arjuna, the soul and the individual work together, there will only be abundance and victory. Thoreau praises the awakening of the people, he believes in the
final victory of the light and the soul, he is certain that Krishna and Arjuna will be united in the end, even if it might take some time.
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Other Sources Related to the Topic


**Illustrations**

Illustration 1:

Illustration 2:
10. Glossary

Ahimsa – non-violence; means that a person should not do any harm to any living creature in thought and action.

Aryans – a people who around 1500 BCE emigrated from the west to the upper Indus Valley.

Atman – the individual’s soul or self.

Bhagavad Gita – a part of the Mahabharata, in which Krishna reveals himself to Arjuna and teaches self-realization.

Bhakti – meaning devotion; bhakti yoga is the yoga of devotion to a chosen god or goddess.

Brahma – often equalled with Vishnu and Shiva, is the manifestation of Brahman into the world.

Brahman – the ultimate reality, the essence of being, the power behind creation.

Deva or devi – Hindi term for god and goddess.

Dharma – refers to the principle or law that governs the universe and to the duties one has to fulfill according to one’s caste. It stands for the law of karma and rebirth and as Buddha formulated these laws dharma can also stand for his teachings.

Durga – one of Shiva’s wives, the representation of untamed nature.

Jiva – the soul of the individual.

Jnana – meaning knowledge; jnana yoga is the path of knowledge of nature by which one connects with Brahman.

http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/hinduism/hglossry.htm,
Kali – one of Shiva’s wives; representing the wild and untamed nature.

Karma – meaning action; karma yoga is the path of action, which is done according to the tastes of the self, without any attachment to the outcome of the work.

Krishna – one of the avatars of Vishnu, he plays the main role in the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita.

Kriya yoga – a meditative yoga practice, including breathing techniques and the raising of the kundalini energy.

Kundalini – the serpent power; the cosmic energy of every individual which lies coiled up like a snake in the root chakra, through practice of yoga it is brought up and merges with the Shiva consciousness.

Lakshmi – the goddess of abundance and happiness.

Mahabharata – an epic written 1400-1200 BCE dealing with the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas; it contains the Bhagavad Gita.
Abstract in German

Thoreaus Beeinflussung durch hinduistische und buddhistische Werke steht außer Zweifel, inwieweit er aber durch diese Philosophien geprägt wurde, und vor allem sein Werk Walden or Life in the Woods eine Sammlung an indischem Gedankengut ist, wird versucht hier zu erläutern.


Bei genauem Vergleich der original hinduistischen Schriften mit Walden und Thoreaus Lebensweise in den drei Jahren am Walden Teich und den Schlüssen, die er daraus zog für sein Leben danach, kann durchaus behauptet werden, dass Thoreau den Weg eines Yogi gegangen ist.
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