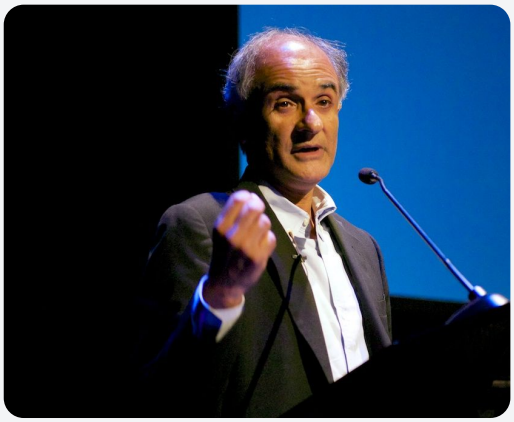
Pico Iyer:
A Modern Transcendentalist

"We all have to make a living, but we also have to make a life."

Who is Pico Iyer?

- Was born in England and is an essayist and novelist
- Known for travel writing and exploration and reflection of the inner life
- Has written 15 books and given 4 TED Talks viewed by millions of people
- Embodies transcendental values of **solitude** as self-reflection and **simplicity**



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Pico Iyer is an essayist and novelist. He writes about travel and as well as his exploration and reflection of the inner life. He has published over 15 books and given 4 TED Talks, including one entitled "What Ping Pong Taught Me About Life," which has received more than 2 million views, including one view by film director Josh Safdie who cast Iyer as a British table tennis official in the film *Marty Supreme*. Through his choices and lifestyle, Iyer embodies key transcendental values, particularly the importance of solitude as a path to self-reflection and a commitment to a life of simplicity.

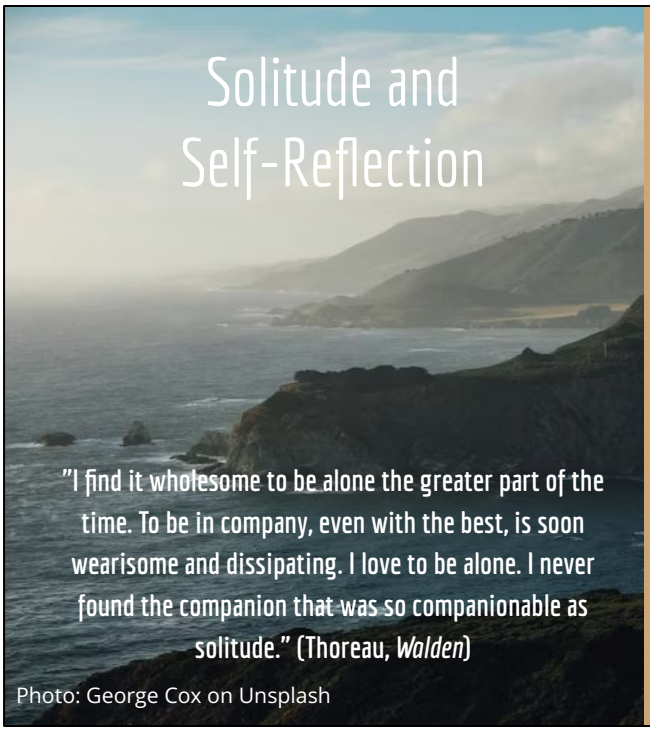
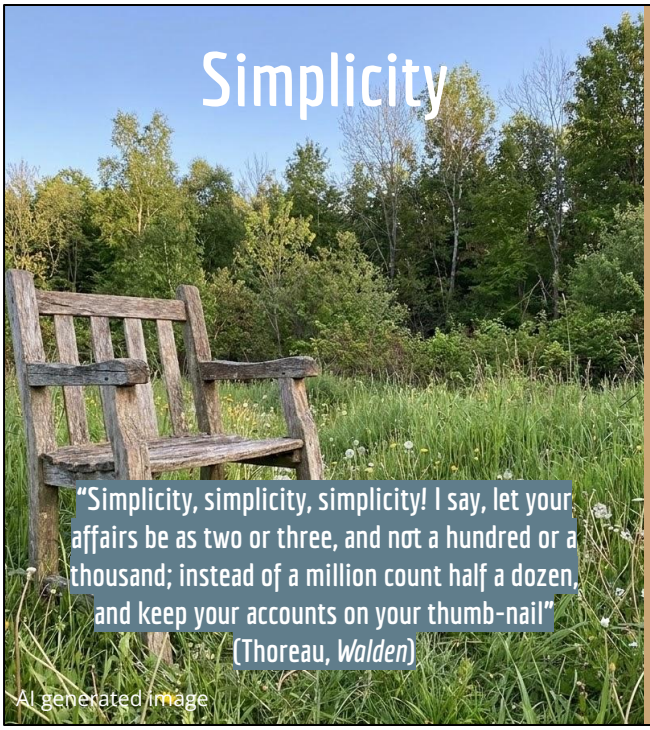


Photo: George Cox on Unsplash

- 1990: Went to first retreat at a monastery in Big Sur, CA, which changed his entire life
- Has made more than 100 retreats to the monastery
- Appreciates the quiet time and being alone
- "But essentially, every time I go there, I remember what I really love, whom I really love. And I also remember what I should be doing with my life."

After a fire destroyed his California home, Iyer went to his first retreat at a Benedictine Hermitage in Big Sur, California, which changed his life. Since then, he has made more than 100 retreats to the monastery. Iyer finds that spending time in quiet saves him from the noise and distraction of everyday life and brings him back to himself, reminding him "what I really love, whom I really love." Iyer also finds that this time of solitude and self-reflection has actually taught him to be better with people. In Walden, Thoreau writes, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time," showing that solitude does not necessarily mean loneliness. Iyer exemplifies Thoreau's idea by showing that solitude has helped center him, leading to deeper understanding of himself and others.



- At 29, moved to Kyoto, Japan
- Lived in a temple for a year, then in a small apartment with two bedrooms
- Spent his evenings simply: walking through the streets, writing letters to friends, and playing ping-pong with neighbors
- "I still live in the vicinity of Kyoto, in a two-room apartment that makes my old monastic cell look almost luxurious by comparison. I have no bicycle, no car, no television I can understand, no media — and the days seem to stretch into eternities, and I can't think of a single thing I lack." (Iyer in 2009)

At 29 years old, Iyer left his dream job as a journalist at *Time Magazine* and his comfortable apartment on Park Avenue in NYC and moved to Kyoto, Japan, to live a simpler life. He spent his first year at a temple, and then moved into a small apartment with two bedrooms and without a car, cell phone, or high-speed Internet. Iyer spent his evenings walking through the city, writing letters to friends, and playing ping pong with neighbors. In *Walden*, Thoreau encourages readers to embrace a life of simplicity, writing, "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand." Iyer embodies Thoreau's words through his intentional choice to remove unnecessary material things and distractions from his life. In 2009, when reflecting on his lifestyle in Japan, Iyer said, "I can't think of a single thing I lack." Like Thoreau, Iyer found joy in simplicity.

Living Deliberately

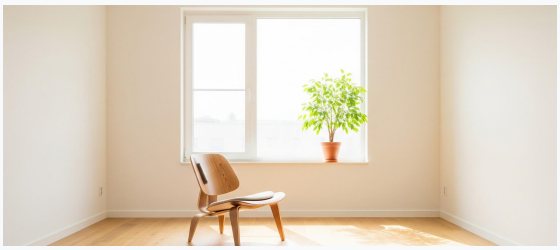
Pico Iyer demonstrates how we can embody transcendental values in today's world



The Power of Solitude

Benefit: Seeking out solitude allows us to connect with ourselves and others

Challenge: Try to work in realistic habits that allow you to embrace solitude as part of your daily life



The Joy of Less

Benefit: A life that is focused on simplicity can lead to contentment and fulfillment

Challenge: Remove a distraction from your life; what could you replace it with?

AI-generated images (Gemini)

Pico Iyer's choices and lifestyle demonstrate how transcendental values can still be embodied, even in today's world. His experiences at retreats highlight the power of solitude. By spending time alone, we can connect with ourselves and, ultimately, with others. Iyer's life also suggests that a life without unnecessary things and distractions can lead to contentment and fulfillment.

As a challenge, consider what habits you could realistically practice in your daily life that allow you to embrace solitude, such as taking a walk alone or silencing your notifications. You might also reflect on one material thing or distraction you could remove from your life and what you could replace it with that would bring your greater joy. While the world today feels chaotic and out of our control, there are small things we can do to live more deliberately.

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