

Riches—Journaling Exercise

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.”

Henry David Thoreau—*Walden*

Journal Prompt: How do you (personally) define wealth? How does our society define wealth? Based on the above quotation, how do you think Henry David Thoreau would define wealth? What forces exist in society that encourage us to want to be materially or financially wealthy/rich? Are there any messages that encourage us to be less materialistic? If so, where do you find those messages? Does the meaning of this quotation relate more to the individual or society?

What thing(s) in your life do you think you could “let alone”? What prevents you from doing so? What thing(s) have you already “let alone”? How did it feel to let go of that thing or those things?

(Remember, the questions are to give you a jumping off point and are not intended to function as a questionnaire. Answer the ones you feel are relevant and feel free to explore topics and questions not provided here as you write.)

As a follow-up: For the next week, try to identify three things each day to “let alone”—get rid of. (Think books, pieces of clothing, knick-knacks, etc.) Journal each day about your process of choosing what things to get rid of and how it feels. Was it difficult to decide? Did it get easier the more you did it? Were your feelings about getting rid of your stuff connected at all to what you did with the items (trash, recycling, donate, give to a friend, etc.)?

On a more conceptual level, are there any inanimate “things” you would like to “let alone”? (Perhaps a bad habit or an unhealthy relationship) What prevents you from letting it go? How would it feel to start taking steps to letting that thing alone?

In either case, Thoreau suggests a richness, or wealth, that comes with being able to let things alone. Does your experience support this suggestion?



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