

At all times, human beings have sought refuge in nature to find their true selves.

Native Americans worshipped nature as “life’s greatest teacher”, and the Romantic poets wrote about the divine spirit of nature, which they believed was a vehicle for self-consciousness. In today’s America, moving westward is still closely related to the idea of developing as an individual.

In the quotation from 1836, the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson pictures nature as a sanctuary for man. One must retire from the civilized world to get the overpowering experience of being in contact with nature: *“In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows”*. The untouched nature is connected to something genuine, and the withdrawing into the wilderness is perceived as a homecoming for man: *“In the woods, we return to reason and faith”*. It can be viewed as a spiritual rebirth, because we adopt an almost childlike, unsophisticated approach to life that purifies our minds: *“a man casts of his years and is always a child”*.

In “Kayaking on the Mississippi”, Mark Mikesch presents a similar attitude towards nature. In his opinion, the wilderness is *“a ritual of mental and physical cleansing”*, because it provides an opportunity to challenge yourself, both physically and intellectually. Mikesch also refers to the American author, Henry David Thoreau, who went to the wilderness *“to live deliberately (...) to see if [he] could learn what it had to teach”*.

The idea of going “back to basics” was also one of the dominating forces in the ‘frontier mentality’. The exile from society required an individualistic “simple living”, which put emphasis on the spiritual aspects of life. In continuation of this, Thoreau asserted that *“the wilderness is the salvation of the world”*. **So essentially, living in harmony with nature is living in harmony with yourself.**

“In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature”

(By Sara Isabella Jønsson, 3.m, 2010)

Se, hvordan skribenten i slutningen af essayet indirekte vender tilbage til udgangspunktet.