

Pico Iyer

WRITER

# My MONEY

As a writer, I'm not in a position to earn much money. I have to write at least 60 articles a year just to pay the bills (the books I write are labours of love: they make almost no money). But I've always wanted to fill my head with something other than money. As one who was educated in expensive private institutions—Eton, Oxford and Harvard—on scholarship, and as one who spent much of my adult life in places not notably affluent (Haiti and Cambodia and Tibet), I've seen extremes of affluence and poverty and I'm not always persuaded the first are better off.

I believe that the ultimate luxury is being able to do without as much as possible. I left my job with Time magazine in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center to live in a single room in a Kyoto guest-house. The car I drive in California today is a rickety bottom-of-the-line 1995 Toyota... At other times, I live in a two-room flat in rural Japan without a car or bicycle or television.

Fifteen years ago, I went to Kyoto to live in a Zen



JENNIFER GELFA

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temple for a year. When I returned to California, a forest fire destroyed my house and everything in it. The day after, the only thing I had in the world was the toothbrush I'd just bought (and, of course, my memories and friendships and beliefs—all my invisible assets). I've always regarded that fire as something of a blessing, both in showing me how perishable and fragile are all material things, and in reminding me that, even with no possessions, I have a life that 98 per cent of the people on the planet would envy. ||

As told to V. Venkatesan