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How to Live

Whitman changed literature when he created free form poetry. He is known as one of the most influential writers in American literature. His is unique in his ability to communicate his beliefs into almost Biblical literature. Reading the “Song of Myself” is transformative as Whitman describes his reliance on Nature and the power and discipline required of an individual. His ability to describe the connection of all things is thought provoking. Whitman describes perfectly the interconnectedness of humanity and nature; everything we need is available to us if we take personal responsibility for locating the solution. Whiteman’s profound beliefs and ability to convincingly share those believes changed not only literature, but also humanity.

Whiteman’s first reference to nature is in verse 5, “I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.” This speaks to the duality that he feels when going to nature for restoration; he is both happy and sad from the experience. This begins the discussion of duality that pervades the poem. There are two sides to a blade of grass. There are two emotions observing the grass, there is always duality and there is also always ultimately choice. This statement could also reveal that initially he was uncomfortable with his need for restoration in nature, since it is outside of self. In verse 19, he leaves behind the loafe and fully commits to the power of nature for him. “I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,I am mad for it to be in contact with me.” Whitman fully surrenders to the power that nature holds for him. After the surrender to nature fully, he comes to see the ALLNESS in just a blade of

grass. Seeing the work of the heavens and stars within something as simple as that same blade he expresses in verse ,

“I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars.” Finally, Whitman shows us a connection we have with the animals and shares what we can learn from animals.

Interestingly he considers animals self contained in the poem, but few animals including humans live in isolation. While self contained, animals (like humans should learn) are self contained but operate perfectly in the animal kingdom. “I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self contained.” This only works because the animal know it’s individual role and is “accountable”.

Song of Myself further explores the value of the individual, after describing the beauty of animals and what they show us. “I celebrate myself, and sing myself”. Whitman is describing the ultimate self contained and self loving man. Song of Myself is an interesting exploration of personal Divinity. He explains the value of man, just in being created. There is no need for anything other than simple existence “I exist as I am, that is enough. If no other in the world be aware I sit content, and if each and all be aware I sit content.” With this understanding, all troubles can fade away; all he needs is himself and he is happy, the ultimate self contained unit. Understand self and mastering your personal world is critical. “One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself”. Finally, Whitman describes that a person must travel their path, it must be lived by you and only you can tread your road. “Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you, you must travel it for yourself.”

Whitman does dive into Spirituality when he begins his discussion of the soul. “I have said that the soul is not more than the body, and I have said that the body is not more than the soul, and nothing, not God, is greater to one than ones self is.” The body and soul are connected

and he states that not even God is more important than self. He further tells us to rely on the soul for direction, not the person's ego. "I believe in you my soul, the other am I must not abase itself to you, and you must not be abased to the other."

The most powerful aspect of Song of Myself might be his illumination of Unity of all. Whitman profoundly describes the power of Unity with the line, "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person." If only humanity could develop true empathy for others in all situations. He gives numerous examples of taking on the pain of another, but he does it in a way that is more powerful, and without religion, then Jesus taking on our sins. Simple experience others pains and help both you and that individual heal. "Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering, see myself in prison shaped like another man, and feel the dull unintermitted pain."

Perhaps the greatest power of the poem is in leveling of everything. No sin is greater, no person is greater. All is equal in Whitman's eyes. "Every though that flounders in me the same flounders in them." People are so quick to judge others' thoughts without the recognition that the same malice is likely within them also. Whitman equates all people in this dimension, helping us to understand the need to no see ourselves as better or someone else as better. "I do not call one greater and one smaller, that which fills it's period and place is equal to any." Again if humanity truly believed that we were all one and born equal, the world would be transformed. Whitman writes "I am not the earth nor an adjunct of an earth, I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself." All of humanity is truly one.

Whitman does speak of his religious beliefs in Song of Myself. Whitman's beliefs are that life never ends, and that God is in every object. Whitman believes in immortality for all even when

they do not know. He believes in life after death and that even new blades of grass show the continuance of life.

Whitman gave homage to all of the Gods and all of the religions, since in his reality it is actually arbitrary. God lives in all and the exact interpretation but different cultures has no real meaning, other to unite us in our personal divinity and accountability. "Taking myself the exact dimensions of jehovah, lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson, Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis. Belus, Brahma, Buddha, In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah on a leaf, the crucifix engraved." He seems no harm in holding these Gods in high regard. The individual soul is one with all and God."All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me, Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul." Whitman while being one with all and one with God, does not try to appear all knowing, leaving God as the highest. "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least." Whitman reveres God at all moments and in every person he encounters. "I see something of God each hour of the twenty four, and each moment then, In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass." Whitman's Divinity can be summed with this statement from Song of Myself "And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own, and I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own, and that all men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers, and that kelson of the creation is love."

Song of Myself is beauty and guidance for life. It gives the individual all that is needed to live a powerful life. We are all connected, we can learn from everything and everyone. The soul which is connected to God never dies. Watch nature for clues, know that you are the same and no is better than anyone and look for the lesson from each person and in each encounter. Whitman

transformed American Literature, but more importantly, transformed lives with the powerful words of *Song of Myself*.