

Song of Myself Summary

Writer: Walt Whitman | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Summary

"Song of Myself" is one of the greatest poems written by Walt Whitman. It first appeared in "Leaves of Grass" in 1855. Whitman continued to revise it throughout his life. The final version was published in 1892. The poem is long and divided into fifty-two sections. It is written in free verse without rhyme or regular rhythm. The speaker is Walt Whitman himself, but he speaks for all human beings. The poem celebrates the human body, the soul, nature, and the unity of all living things. It teaches that every person is connected through the same life force.

Whitman's Idea of the Self: The poem begins with the poet's celebration of himself. He says, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself." But he also adds, "What I assume you shall assume." It means his self is not separate from others. His "self" includes all people, all places, and all experiences. Whitman's "I" represents every human being. He believes that the soul of one person is linked to the soul of all others. The individual and the universe are one. This idea of unity runs through the entire poem.

Interconnectedness of Life: Whitman feels that all life is connected. He believes that every atom that belongs to him also belongs to others. He thinks that the body and the soul are not two different things. The same divine energy flows through all living beings. He reminds readers that life on earth is made of the same matter. The air we breathe, the food we eat, and the soil under our feet connect us all. This unity makes every person equal and sacred.

Celebration of the Body and the Soul: Whitman praises both the body and the soul. He does not separate spiritual life from physical life. He says the human body is holy. It is not shameful but beautiful and divine. He celebrates every part of the body, male or female. He believes that the body is the expression of the soul. When he feels pleasure or pain, it is also a spiritual experience. For Whitman, the physical and the spiritual are one and the same truth. This idea makes his poetry joyful and life-affirming.

The Symbol of Grass: In section six, a child asks him, "What is the grass?" The poet cannot give one fixed answer. He says that the grass is the symbol of life. It grows everywhere and belongs to everyone. It connects all people: rich and poor, young and old, living and dead. Grass grows from the soil, and the soil holds the bodies of the dead. So, grass becomes a

symbol of rebirth and equality. Through grass, Whitman shows that death is not an end but a new beginning.

The Cycle of Life and Death: Whitman believes that death is not an end, but a transition. It is only a part of the natural cycle. The dead become soil, and the soil gives life to new plants. This idea gives comfort and peace. Death, for Whitman, is another form of life. He writes that he does not fear death because he will continue to live in another form. His body will mix with the earth, and new life will rise from it. This belief makes him calm and accepting of life's changes.

The Senses and Everyday Life: Whitman celebrates all human senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. He believes that through these senses we experience the divine world around us. The sound of birds, the smell of grass, the touch of a friend, or the sight of the sky—all are sacred. He often describes ordinary people and daily work. He finds beauty in workers, sailors, farmers, women, and children. Every moment of life is holy for him. He wants people to enjoy life fully and to feel connected to nature.

Work and Common People: The poem honors common working people. Whitman lists different professions. They include carpenters, mechanics, farmers, shoemakers, teachers, and sailors. He respects their labor because it keeps life moving. He sees all work as equal and necessary. Through these descriptions, he shows his love for democracy. He believes that America's greatness lies in its diversity and equality. The poem becomes a celebration of ordinary people who live simple and honest lives.

Scenes of Human Experience: In section thirty-three, Whitman presents a long series of human scenes. He describes people at work, travelers on the road, lovers in joy, and soldiers in war. He even imagines himself as part of their lives. He says he becomes the slave, the soldier, the mother, and the dying man. By doing this, he demonstrates profound sympathy for all human suffering and happiness. He believes that the poet must share the experience of others. He feels the pain of others as if it were his own.

The Twenty-Ninth Bather: In section eleven, Whitman tells the story of a woman watching twenty-eight young men bathing in the sea. She imagines joining them unseen as the "twenty-ninth bather." This part shows the beauty of human bodies and innocent desire. It also expresses the wish for connection. The woman wants to be part of their world without disturbing it. For Whitman, this image means spiritual union. True understanding comes when we feel one with others, not apart from them.

Whitman's View of God: Whitman believes that God is not far away in heaven. God is everywhere—in every person, plant, and animal. He sees God in the smallest atom and in the stars. For him, to love life is to love God. He rejects strict religious rules. He believes that seeing the divine in all things is true faith. God, for him, lives within the self and within nature. This view makes his poetry deeply spiritual yet free from fear or guilt.

The Idea of Equality and Democracy: The poem celebrates democracy. Whitman says that all people are equal, no matter their color, gender, or class. He sees America as a land of freedom and brotherhood. Every worker, every child, and every woman has divine value. The poet's voice includes all people. He does not speak for one group but for the entire human family. His dream is a world where love, equality, and respect guide human relations.

Time, Eternity, and the Universe: Whitman thinks about the meaning of time and eternity. He says human life is short compared to the vast universe. But every moment of life has meaning because it is part of the eternal process. The stars, the sea, and the earth are endless. They remind him that life never truly ends. Time is a cycle, not a line. Every generation dies and is born again. Through this idea, Whitman shows that humans belong to something much larger than themselves.

Teaching and Learning: Whitman sees himself as both a learner and a teacher. He learns from nature, from people, and from his own experiences. He also wants to guide others to find truth for themselves. He says that no one should blindly follow another person's belief. Each person must listen to their inner voice and discover the truth directly. He invites readers to continue his journey of discovery after he is gone.

Speech, Expression, and the "Yawp": Whitman feels a strong desire to express what he sees and feels. He says that his vision cannot stay silent. In the last part of the poem, he "sounds [his] barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." This cry represents his free and fearless spirit. It is not refined or polite; it is natural and powerful. It shows his deep connection with life. Through this "yawp," he gives his soul to the world.

Acceptance of Death: In the final sections, Whitman faces death with peace. He calls death "lucky." He says that he will not disappear after death. Instead, he will become part of nature. He will live in the grass, the air, and the earth. He tells the reader that they will find him under their feet. This ending shows his belief in eternal life and the unity of all things. Death is only a change, not an end.

Overall, "Song of Myself" is a spiritual journey from the self to the universe. It celebrates life, nature, equality, and love. Whitman teaches that the divine exists in every human and every

object. The poem praises democracy and the sacredness of ordinary life. It joins body and soul, earth and heaven, life and death into one great harmony. Through this poem, Whitman gives a message of hope, freedom, and eternal connection among all beings.

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