

SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD

1 Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
 Healthy, free, the world before me,
 The long brown path before me leading wher-
 ever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am
 good-fortune,
 Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no
 more, need nothing,
 Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous
 criticisms,
 Strong and content I travel the open road.

The earth, that is sufficient,
 I do not want the constellations any nearer,
 I know they are very well where they are,
 I know they suffice for those who belong to them.

(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,
 I carry them, men and women, I carry them with
 me wherever I go,
 I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,
 I am fill'd with them; and I will fill them in return.)

You road I enter upon and look around, I believe
 you are not all that is here,
 I believe that much unseen is also here.

2

Here the profound lesson of reception, nor prefer-
 ence nor denial,
 The black with his woolly head, the felon, the dis-
 eas'd, the illiterate person, are not denied;
 The birth, the hasting after the physician, the beg-
 gar's tramp, the drunkard's stagger, the laughing
 party of mechanics,
 The escaped youth, the rich person's carriage, the
 fop, the eloping couple,
 The early market-man, the hearse, the moving of
 furniture into the town, the return back from
 the town,
 They pass, I also pass, any thing passes, none can be
 interdicted,
 None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to
 me.

3 You air that serves me with breath
 to speak!
 You objects that call from diffusion my
 meanings and give them shape!
 You light that wraps me and all things in delicate
 equable showers!
 You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the
 roadsides!
 I believe you are latent with/unseen existences, you
 are so dear to me.

You flagg'd walks of the cities! you strong curbs at
 the edges!
 You ferries! you planks and posts of wharves! you
 timber-lined sides! you distant ships!
 You rows of houses! you window-pierc'd facades!
 you roofs!
 You porches and entrances! you copings and iron
 guards!
 You windows whose transparent shells might
 expose so much!
 You doors and ascending steps! you arches!
 You gray stones of interminable pavements! you
 trodden crossings!
 From all that has touch'd you I believe you have
 imparted to yourselves, and now would impart
 the same secretly to me,
 From the living and the dead you have peopled
 your impassive surfaces, and the spirits thereof
 would be evident and amicable with me.

4 The earth expanding right hand and left hand,
 The picture alive, every part in its best light,
 The music falling in where it is wanted, and stop-
 ping where it is not wanted,
 The cheerful voice of the public road, the gay fresh
 sentiment of the road.

O highway I travel, do you say to me *Do not
 leave me?*
 Do you say *Venture not—if you leave me you
 are lost?*
 Do you say *I am already prepared, I am wellbeaten
 and undenied, adhere to me?*

O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave
 you, yet I love you,
 You express me better than I can express myself,
 You shall be more to me than my poem.

I think heroic deeds were all conceiv'd in the open
 air, and all free poems also,
 I think I could stop here myself and do miracles,
 I think whatever I shall meet on the road I shall
 like, and whoever beholds me shall like me,
 I think whoever I see must be happy.

5

From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and
 imaginary lines,
 Going where I list, my own master total and
 absolute,
 Listening to others, considering well what they say,
 Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
 Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself
 of the holds that would hold me.

I inhale great draughts of space,
 The east and the west are mine, and the north and
 the south are mine.

I am larger, better than I thought,
 I did not know I held so much goodness.

All seems beautiful to me,
 I can repeat over to men and women You have
 done such good to me I would do the same to
 you,
 I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
 I will scatter myself among men and women as I
 go,
 I will toss a new gladness and roughness among
 them,

Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me,
 Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and
 shall bless me.

Now if a thousand perfect men were to

appear it would not amaze me,

Now if a thousand beautiful forms of

women appear'd it would not astonish me.

Now I see the secret of the making of the best per-
 sons,
 It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep
 with the earth.

Here a great personal deed has room,
 (Such a deed seizes upon the hearts of the whole
 race of men,
 Its effusion of strength and will overwhelms law
 and mocks all authority and all argument
 against it.)

Here is the test of wisdom,
 Wisdom is not finally tested in schools,
 Wisdom cannot be pass'd from one having it to
 another not having it,
 Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is
 its own proof,

Applies to all stages and objects and qualities and is
 content,
 Is the certainty of the reality and immortality of
 things, and the excellence of things;
 Something there is in the float of the sight of things
 that provokes it out of the soul.

Now I re-examine philosophies and religions,
 They may prove well in lecture-rooms, yet not
 prove at all under the spacious clouds and along
 the landscape and flowing currents.

6

Here is realization,
Here is a man tallied – he realizes here what he has
in him,
The past, the future, majesty, love – if they are
vacant of you, you are vacant of them.

Only the kernel of every object nourishes;
Where is he who tears off the husks for you and
me?
Where is he that undoes stratagems and envelopes
for you and me?

Here is adhesiveness, it is not previously fashion'd,
it is apropos;
Do you know what it is as you pass to be loved by
strangers?
Do you know the talk of those turning eye-balls?

7 Here is the efflux of the soul,
The efflux of the soul comes from within through
embower'd gates, ever provoking questions,
These yearnings why are they? these thoughts in the
darkness why are they?
Why are there men and women that while they are
nigh me the sunlight expands my blood?
Why when they leave me do my pennants of joy
sink flat and lank?
Why are there trees I never walk under but large
and melodious thoughts descend upon me?
(I think they hang there winter and summer on
those trees and always drop fruit as I pass;)
What is it I interchange so suddenly with strangers?
What with some driver as I ride on the seat by his
side?
What with some fisherman drawing his seine by the
shore as I walk by and pause?
What gives me to be free to a woman's and man's
good-will? what gives them to be free to mine?

8 The efflux of the soul is happiness, here is
happiness,
I think it pervades the open air, waiting at all times,
Now it flows unto us, we are rightly charged.

Here rises the fluid and attaching character,
The fluid and attaching character is the freshness
and sweetness of man and woman,
(The herbs of the morning sprout no fresher and
sweeter every day out of the roots of themselves,
than it sprouts fresh and sweet continually out
of itself.)

Toward the fluid and attaching character exudes the
sweat of the love of young and old,
From it falls distill'd the charm that mocks beauty
and attainments,
Toward it heaves the shuddering longing ache of
contact.

Allons! whoever you are come
travel with me!
Traveling with me you find what
never tires.

The earth never tires,
The earth is rude, silent, incomprehensible at first,
Nature is rude and incomprehensible at first,
Be not discouraged, keep on, there are divine things
well envelop'd,
I swear to you there are divine things more beauti-
ful than words can tell.

Allons! we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stores, however conve-
nient this dwelling we cannot remain here,
However shelter'd this port and however calm these
waters we must not anchor here,
However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us
we are permitted to receive it but a little while.

10 Allons! the inducements shall be greater,
We will sail pathless and wild seas,
We will go where winds blow, waves dash, and the
Yankee clipper speeds by under full sail.

Allons! with power, liberty, the earth, the elements,
Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity;
Allons! from all formules!
From your formules, O bat-eyed and materialistic
priests.

The stale cadaver blocks up the passage – the burial
waits no longer.

Allons! yet take warning!
He traveling with me needs the best blood, thews,
endurance,
None may come to the trial till he or she bring
courage and health,
Come not here if you have already spent the best of
yourself,

Only those may come who come in sweet and
determin'd bodies,
No diseas'd person, no rum-drinker or venereal
taint is permitted here.

(I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes,
rhymes,
We convince by our presence.)

11 Listen! I will be honest with you,
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer
rough new prizes,
These are the days that must happen to you:
You shall not heap up what is call'd riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn
or achieve,

You but arrive at the city to which you were des-
tin'd, you hardly settle yourself to satisfaction
before you are call'd by an irresistible call to
depart,
You shall be treated to the ironical smiles and
mockings of those who remain behind you,
What beckonings of love you receive you shall only
answer with passionate kisses of parting,
You shall not allow the hold of those who spread
their reach'd hands toward you.

Allons! after the great Companions, and to belong
to them!
They too are on the road – they are
the swift and majestic men –
they are the greatest women,

12 Enjoyers of calms of seas and storms of seas,
Sailors of many a ship, walkers of many a mile of
land,
Habitués of many distant countries, habitués of far-
distant dwellings,
Trusters of men and women, observers of cities,
solitary toilers,
Pausers and contemplators of tufts, blossoms, shells
of the shore,
Dancers at wedding-dances, kissers of brides, ten-
der helpers of children, bearers of children,
Soldiers of revolts, standers by gaping graves, low-
erers-down of coffins,
Journeyers over consecutive seasons, over the years,
the curious years each emerging from that
which preceded it,
Journeyers as with companions, namely their own
diverse phases,
Forth-steppers from the latent unrealized baby-
days,
Journeyers gayly with their own youth, journeyers
with their bearded and well-grain'd manhood,
Journeyers with their womanhood, ample, unsur-
pass'd, content,
Journeyers with their own sublime old age of man-
hood or womanhood,
Old age, calm, expanded, broad with the haughty
breadth of the universe,
Old age, flowing free with the delicious near-by
freedom of death.

13 Allons! to that which
is endless as it was
beginningless,
To undergo much, tramps of days, rests of nights,

To merge all in the travel they tend to, and the days
and nights they tend to,
Again to merge them in the start of superior jour-
neys,
To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it
and pass it,
To conceive no time, however distant, but what you
may reach it and pass it,
To look up or down no road but it stretches and
waits for you, however long but it stretches and
waits for you,
To see no being, not God's or any, but you also go
thither,
To see no possession but you may possess it, enjoy-
ing all without labor or purchase, abstracting
the feast yet not abstracting one particle of it,
To take the best of the farmer's farm and the rich
man's elegant villa, and the chaste blessings of
the well-married couple, and the fruits of
orchards and flowers of gardens,
To take to your use out of the compact cities as you
pass through,
To carry buildings and streets with you afterward
wherever you go,
To gather the minds of men out of their brains as
you encounter them, to gather the love out of
their hearts,
To take your lovers on the road with you, for all
that you leave them behind you,
To know the universe itself as a road, as many
roads, as roads for traveling souls.

All parts away for the progress of souls,
All religion, all solid things, arts, governments – all
that was or is apparent upon this globe or any
globe, falls into niches and corners before the
procession of souls along the grand roads of the
universe.

Of the progress of the souls of men and women
along the grand roads of the universe, all other
progress is the needed emblem and sustenance.

Forever alive, forever forward,
Stately, solemn, sad, withdrawn, baffled, mad, tur-
bulent, feeble, dissatisfied,
Desperate, proud, fond, sick, accepted by men,
rejected by men,
They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know
not where they go,
But I know that they go toward the best – toward
something great.

Whoever you are, come forth! or man or woman
come forth!
You must not stay sleeping and dallying there in the
house, though you built it, or though it has been
built for you.

Out of the dark confinement! out from behind the
screen!
It is useless to protest, I know all and expose it.

Behold through you as bad as the rest,
Through the laughter, dancing, dining, supping, of
people,
Inside of dresses and ornaments, inside of those
wash'd and trimm'd faces,
Behold a secret silent loathing and despair.

No husband, no wife, no friend, trusted to hear the
confession,
Another self, a duplicate of every one, skulking and
hiding it goes,
Formless and wordless through the streets of the
cities, polite and bland in the parlors,
In the cars of railroads, in steamboats, in the public
assembly,
Home to the houses of men and women, at the
table, in the bedroom, everywhere,
Smartly attired, countenance smiling, form upright,
death under the breast-bones, hell under the
skull-bones,
Under the broadcloth and gloves, under the rib-
bons and artificial flowers,
Keeping fair with the customs, speaking not a sylla-
ble of itself,
Speaking of any thing else but never of itself.

14 Allons! through struggles and wars!
The goal that was named cannot be countermand-
ed.
Have the past struggles succeeded?
What has succeeded? yourself? your nation?
Nature?
Now understand me well – it is provided in the
essence of things that from any fruition of suc-
cess, no matter what, shall come forth some-
thing to make a greater struggle necessary.

My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebel-
lion,
He going with me must go well arm'd,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, pover-
ty, angry enemies, desertions.

Allons! the road is before us!
It is safe – I have tried it –
my own feet have tried it
well – be not detain'd!
Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and
the book on the shelf unopen'd!

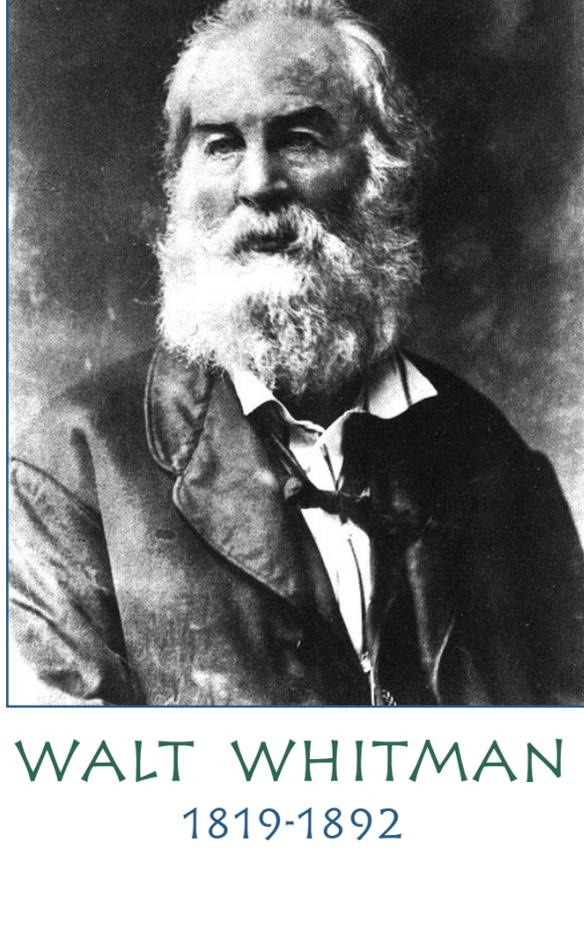
15

Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the
money remain unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the
teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer
plead in the court, and the judge expound the
law.

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precise than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel
with me?

Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?





WALT WHITMAN

1819-1892

This digital rendition of Walt Whitman's *Song of the Open Road* takes on new significance as our digital highways converge. Great poems do that. They outlive their own time and enter the future not as old poems, but as fresh metaphors reminding us of how our future is linked to our past. In this digital edition of *Song of the Open Road*, no doubt accessed by its readers over an electronic network, Walt Whitman speaks to a new breed of readers the same way he spoke to the travelers of the 19th century... Rejoice in the pathways of discovery.

Song of the Open Road is one of dozens of poems in Walt Whitman's masterpiece *Leaves of Grass*, available in bookstores across the world in dozens of languages. A book with a unique past, as well as an unique author, it should be required reading for anyone wishing access on any road, highway, or any other of life's journeys.

The following is an excerpt from Whitman's *Preface* to the 1855 Edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

The land and sea, the animals fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests mountains and rivers, are not small themes... but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects... they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls. Men and women perceive the beauty well enough... probably as well as he. The passionate tenacity of hunters, woodmen, early risers, cultivators of gardens and orchards and fields, the love of healthy women for the manly form, seafaring persons, drivers of horses, the passion for light and the open air, all is an old varied sign of the unfailing perception of beauty and of a residence of the poetic in outdoor people. They can never be assisted by poets to perceive... some may but they never can. The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations are not independent but dependent. All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. If the greatneses are in conjunction in a man or woman it is enough... the fact will prevail through the universe... but the gaggery and gilt of a million years will not prevail. Who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost. This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, reexamine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body... The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is always ready plowed and manured... others may not know it but he shall. He shall go directly to the creation. His trust shall master the trust of everything he touches... and shall master all attachment.

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