

Journeys Within: A Collection of Poems on Discovery and Strength

Collected and Curated by Sam Pezdirtz

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Introduction:

My chapbook's intended audience is for anyone who is trying to understand themselves better. Life is all but the choices and challenges we encounter, and these poems explore the journey it is to go through them. These poems show glimpses of courage, fear, and reflection.

The poems "Invictus," "The Journey," and "The Road Not Taken" all speak about seeking strength when life is feeling uncertain. Others, like "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and "A Dream Within a Dream," teach us that every moment matters in this short life of ours.

This collection is to help us better understand the struggles we all face, hopefully learning from them as we live. Life is about carrying on, even if we don't know where our paths may lead.

Invictus

BY WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51642/invictus>

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
 Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
 I am the captain of my soul.

The Journey

By: Mary Oliver

https://hellopoetry.com/poem/5249/the-journey/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn

through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Ulysses

BY: ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45392/ulysses>

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

 This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,

When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Adventure

By: Robert William Service

https://www.best-poems.net/robert_w_service/adventure.html

Out of the wood my White Knight came:
His eyes were bright with a bitter flame,
As I clung to his stirrup leather;
For I was only a dreaming lad,
Yet oh, what a wonderful faith I had!
And the song in my heart was never so glad,
As we took to the trail together.

"Friends and lovers, good-bye," I said;
Never once did I turn my head,
Though wickedly wild the weather
min were the rover's rags and scars,
And the rover's bed beneath the stars,
But never the shadow of prison bars,
As we ranged the world together.

Dreary and darkling was the trail,
But my Knight was clad in a gleaming mail,
And he plucked from his plume a feather.
And oh how foolishly proud was I!
"I'll wear it," I told him, "till I die;
Freemen we'll be of sea and sky,
To the ends of the earth together."

Yet now I know by my failing breath
I'm ripe for the last adventure, Death,
And I've reached the end of my tether:
But my Knight of the shining mail is there,
And his eyes are bright and he bids me dare:
So into the Dark let's boldly fare,
Into the Dark . . . together.

The Road Not Taken

BY: ROBERT FROST

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Because I could not stop for Death – (479)

BY: EMILY DICKINSON

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47652/because-i-could-not-stop-for-death-479>

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

A Dream Within a Dream

By: Edgar Allan Poe

<https://poets.org/poem/dream-within-dream>

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow:
You are not wrong who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.
I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand--
How few! yet how they creep

Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep--while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

Do not go gentle into that good night

By: Dylan Thomas

<https://poets.org/poem/do-not-go-gentle-good-night>

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Still I Rise

By: Maya Angelou

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise>

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise

If—

By: Rudyard Kipling

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46473/if—>

If you can keep your head when all about you

Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,

But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,

Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,

Or being hated, don't give way to hating,

And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

“Hope” is the thing with feathers

By: Emily Dickinson

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42889/hope-is-the-thing-with-feathers-314>

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Mother to Son

By: Langston Hughes

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47559/mother-to-son>

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

By: Robert Frost

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42891/stopping-by-woods-on-a-snowy-evening>

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Ozymandias

By: Percy Bysshe Shelley

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias>

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Reflection:

When starting this book, my goal was to help people who are trying to understand themselves. This chapbook is for anyone who feels unsure and wants to find meaning in those feelings. I think poetry is a beautiful gateway for people looking to slow down and think. Reading these poems helped me reflect on what it means to be strong and courageous. They teach me to choose my own path and to never look back, even when times are hard.

Each of the poems I chose connect with the idea of personal growth. “Invictus” and “If” about staying strong when our lives feel out of control. Both of these poems talk about being courageous while having mental toughness. These two things are very important to me in my life. Onward, “The Journey” by Mary Oliver shows me that we all have our own voice, and we sometimes need to listen to it even if others don’t understand. “The Road not Taken” and “Ulysses” are similarly about one’s own adventure and choice. While one shows reflection, the other shows a bold ambition. Both of these poems urge every person to find their own way.

I chose to add “A Dream Within a Dream” and “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” because they made me start thinking about time and life. “A Dream Within a Dream” questions if we are ever able to hold on to our moments. Similarly, “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” tells us how death is only but a natural part of living. Even though these poems are more serious, they preach of peace and acceptance for everyone.

Next, the poems “The Second Coming” and “Ozymandias” try looking at our world in a bigger way. These poems reminded me that even the strongest people / civilizations are eventually washed away. They particularly made me think about the human spirit and times place in our histories changes. These are a great addition to the collection because they remind us that life is not personal, but it is part of a bigger cycle.

The last set of poems “Still I Rise,” “Mother to Son,” “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night,” “Hope is the Thing with Feathers,” and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” talk about different kinds of strength. These poems show us how strength can be born from hope and

love alone. Together, they teach us that strength can be both loud and quiet, known or private. These many forms of strength are for us to find, discover, and use.

Most of these poems were discovered on the Poetry Foundation website. Out of the many poems I read, these were the ones that resonated with me the most. I wanted to choose poems that spoke through feelings and strong messages. I noticed that these poems all met a similar objective, even though they were written by different people from different times. They all talked about people's choices, struggles, and the quest for meaning in one's life.

Making the physical copy of this chapbook was also an important task for this project. I printed these poems in the library in an effort to make a simple hand-out book, one that is quick and easy to read.

While making this book of mine, I learned that poetry can connect people across time. I was able to slow down and really think about my own life and where I'm going. Each poem brings something new to the table, each thing filling in a bigger puzzle. They are all trying to grasp the feeling of being human, trying to help us discover who we are as humans.

