

‘Desiderata’ By Max Ehrmann (1927): Analysis by Emma Baldwin (<https://poemanalysis.com/>)

Lines 1-8

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

In the first eight lines of ‘Desiderata’ the speaker, who is without gender or race, asks that everyone, no matter their background or future “Go placidly amid the noise and haste”. This is one of the best-known lines in this piece and is often used in place of the title. The word “placidly” means peacefully or calmly, this is one of the major themes of the text. In that peace, one can find “silence,” something that is beneficial for one’s state of mind.

The next few lines suggest ways of dealing with one’s own truth and that of others. One of the most poignant pieces of advice is in the seventh and eighth lines. It asks that “you” listen to everyone, even the “dull and ignorant” as they too “have their story”.

One of the best qualities of this prose poem is its vague, yet strikingly relatable, suggestions. Because the poet does not use names or locations anyone who is reading the text of ‘Desiderata’ can interpret the advice in relation to their own life.

Lines 9-21

Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism.

As a complement to the emphasis on silence in the first lines, the next suggest that you “Avoid loud and aggressive persons”. It is better to stay away from things that rouse your spirit painfully or unnecessarily. One of the features of this poem is the way that Ehrmann chose to arrange each line of advice. Generally, the statements take up two lines the first half telling you what to do and the second telling you why it is a good idea.

For example, lines seven and eight. The first tells the reader to stay interested in their own career because, as the eighth line states, “it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time”.

In this section of ‘Desiderata’ Ehrmann is emphasizing the themes of self-worth and self-analysis. He suggests that it is necessary to understand one’s relationship to the rest of the world and always take note of the virtues many people exhibit.

Lines 22-33

Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

The poem that you should “Be yourself”. This is followed by details and reasons why not staying true to one’s nature can be detrimental. Age, he continues on, is not something to be fought. One should “Take kindly the counsel of the years”. In this section of ‘Desiderata’ the speaker also promotes understanding the darkness of the world without distressing oneself over it. It is easy to become fearful due to “fatigue and loneliness” he adds. Therefore, it is necessary to be kind to oneself in the face of these eventualities.

Lines 34-46

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

In the last lines of the poem, the speaker alludes to the interconnectivity between all living things. "You," he states directly, are a "child of the universe" as much as the trees and stars are. "You," he adds, "have a right to be here". These simple lines are effective. Even more so as they are followed up with the command to "be at peace with God" in whatever form you "conceive Him to be". This introduces themes of equality, happiness, peace within oneself, and with others who are different.

The final lines of 'Desiderata' are a reminder of the beauty of the world and the need to remember that fact when one is confronted with "drudgery, and broken dreams". The last two lines ask that you "Be cheerful" and "Strive to be happy". With these simple suggestions, the poem ends, leaving the reader to interpret each piece of advice as they see fit.

'If' by Rudyard Kipling (1895): Analysis by Jamie Jenson

<https://poemanalysis.com/>

First Stanza

If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

In this first "if" scenario, Kipling reminds the reader of the importance of maintaining a level head even when those around the reader do not have one and are blaming the situation on the reader. It should be noted here that the reader soon realizes the poem is really one long sentence. The poem ends on a particularly high note, which Kipling emphasizes with his use of an exclamation point.

The third and fourth lines present the next "if" situation. Kipling writes, "If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, / But make allowance for their doubting too [...]" Here, the speaker emphasizes two traits that all people must possess: self-trust and the ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of others, even if that means understanding that people will not always like or agree with you. The final four lines of the first stanza flow together nicely, almost sounding as though they are one complete thought. Kipling writes:

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...

In these lines, the speaker is telling the reader to have patience. In addition, he informs the reader that even if he or she is lied about, he or she should not stoop to the level of a liar. If he or she is hated, he or she must not become hateful, and finally, the reader should not appear to be better than he or she actually is, nor should he or she talk in a manner that does not reflect who they are morally or spiritually.

Second Stanza

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master; if you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,

Here, Kipling urges his reader to dream and think but not to get so caught up in dreams and thoughts that the reader loses his grasp on reality. Kipling uses personification in his next two lines:

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same;

Kipling's diction here is also worth mentioning. The word impostor suggests a pretense or disguise. Perhaps he uses this word to showcase the fleeting nature of both: success never stays, nor does disaster. Additionally, he could possibly be suggesting that these two words often come with disruption or change. In any case, the reader should not dwell too much on either triumph or disaster because they will soon disappear.

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

The speaker informs the reader that he or she must be able to endure hearing his or her words being twisted by dishonest and harmful people in order to serve their own agendas. He continues this thought in the last two lines of the stanza, writing:

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken, and stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools,

The speaker demonstrates in these lines the importance of being able to pick oneself up and start again if they fail—even if the thing they've failed at has taken all of their life to attempt. The reader must always be prepared to start again.

Third Stanza

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...

The theme in these lines is very similar to the one in the last two lines of the previous stanza: if you lose everything, you must be willing to begin again. Not only that, but you must also be willing to forget about the loss and not dwell on it.

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew to serve your turn long after they are gone, and so hold on where there is nothing in you except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

These lines are particularly powerful. The speaker is imploring the reader to endure, even if that feels both physically (sinew) and emotionally (heart and nerve) impossible. It is also worth noting the capitalization of "Will." Perhaps Kipling wanted to emphasize the resilience of the human spirit here by making it a power that is separate from the person who possesses it.

Fourth Stanza

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,

It should not matter with whom the reader is walking; he or she needs to treat the lowest of the low and the highest in a society exactly the same—with kindness.

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, If all men count with you, but none too much,

Kipling is reminding his reader that it is important to be able to bounce back from disappointment or pain. One must not dwell on his enemies or the hurt a loved one could potentially cause.

If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run,

He is telling his reader never to give up or waste even a single second of time. If you are given a minute, make sure you use all sixty seconds of it.

Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, And—which is more—you'll be a Man [sic], my son [sic]!

If one is able to keep all of these things in check, one will have the world at one's fingertips.

Written in 1895 it is framed for a male authenticity, but it still holds true for a female authenticity, or alternatively an Androgenous perspective.