

# Main idea of transcendentalism

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## **Leading a Fulfilled Life**

Transcendentalism is the great fight between one's identity and the oppressive conformity of the world. Throughout history, Transcendentalists preached that being "Self reliant" was the greatest quality a man could hold. A person's intellectualism and spirituality wasn't corrupted by these oppressive conformists if they followed their own self. Transcendentalism argues against the ideal that the American Dream insists on an individual's passage upward in status and class, hence that individual must exchange her identity for that passage. Transcendentalists like Thoreau, Whitman, and Emerson believed that the American Dream or ideal life is one that can be reached by being self reliant and not controlled by conformists.

By following your instinctual drift and learning from your own mistakes, a path to self reliance will be paved. Henry Thoreau believed in this methodology and as a Transcendentalist he decided to live in the woods for two years. He isolated himself so that he could focus on his own thinking and learn for himself how to live independently and to ultimately become self reliant. In his book, *Walden*, Thoreau states that, " if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." Thoreau from his experience in the woods shares that by following one's self you will gain success that you had not expected. People doubt themselves and submit to outside forces to tell them what to do.

Individuality is lost through this self doubt and " societal goals" are reached through a loss of identity. Societal goals are those that are not yours, but yet you strive for. The real American Dream is to be free and to have what you

really want. Thoreau talks about life and how, “ It looks poorest when you are richest.” Wealth is a made up societal goal that erodes your self worth and identity. The real dream is one of your own that doesn’t erode identity, but strengthens it.

Individuality is the strongest quality a human possesses. It’s what makes you different from others and what adds value to your life. Ralph Waldo Emerson is believed to be the starter of transcendentalism. He was different and relied on his individuality and expanded upon it. Now millions of people respect Emerson and acknowledge his value to life. In his essay Self Reliance, Emerson proclaimed, “ To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” His life was not dictated by others, but by himself. He was the true pilot of his life by following his own American Dream and being his true self. He wants people to, “ not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” You should not be following another person’s dreams, it erodes your self identity and creates a mimic of who you’re following. Life is set forth for you to discover yourself and explore at your own will, not to follow in the footsteps of those deemed “ leaders”. Emerson spread this ideal and it developed into what we know today as Transcendentalism.

Nature and love come in close ties with Transcendentalism. Walt Whitman added love to the mixture of this new and different belief. He professed that by believing in yourself, but also others, you can achieve your greatest dreams. By giving respect to others you are spreading true individuality, because in a sense you are accepting them for who they are and not eroding their true self. Some people need help from others in order to be themselves

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in public, because “ following” is an ideal taught from birth. Walt Whitman in the preface of his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*, insists that “ This is what you shall do; Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone 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.” Despise riches and invest yourself to what truly is important, everything around you. By respecting all and striving to be the greatest person you can be, you reach a fulfilled and meaningful life. To be proud that you were who you were born to be and not someone else’s puppet. By being observant you can also find true answers within yourself. Whitman also tested things he didn’t believe and had courage, because he followed himself. He stated that, “ God is a mean-spirited, pugnacious bully bent on revenge against His children for failing to live up to his impossible standards.” A courageous move by Whitman, yet it makes sense. By thinking on his own he was able to test an ideal that millions of people follow, he simply spoke his mind. Being yourself is the American Dream.

Are we robots or humans? Robots are created to do things that they are told to do. They have no identity and no say during their “ lives” and their goals are determined by its creator. Scary to think that this description is interchangeable with many people. Can we blame them, they are raised from birth that wealth is the ultimate goal and that the direct path to it is the schooling system, where children are brainwashed to memorize and calculate. It becomes a breed of people that pass the ideal from generation to generation. *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald perfectly makes fun of

these “ robots” and the result of their breed. The book gives off the impression that the American Dream can only be acquired through the loss of identity. What it fails to realize is that the American Dream is personal and not strictly being wealthy. It is winning the fight to become free from oppressive forces trying to mold you into something else. It is being self reliant and having great character and respect for all views. Everyone should be a leader, a leader of their own lives.