

Poem-3 Keeping Quiet (Summary)

By-Pablo Neruda

This poem advocates the importance of silence and self-introspection. It can transform not only the life of an individual but also the face of the earth. The poet says that it does not need much time to look within and examine oneself. It will take only as long as it will take to count to twelve. During this time of introspection (self-examination), one should keep quiet and say nothing at all. It will give him a strange feeling of togetherness with all others.

Although it may seem a little strange in the beginning, it will eventually bring us all together. This silence will be free from 'the disturbing sounds of engines and people rushing to get their work done' for some time. He feels contented imagining the change that will be brought about in those moments. The men who hurt their hands while collecting salt will get a little rest. Even the people who seek fresh wars, using fatal gas and weapons, will put on clean clothes and get a chance to walk among their brothers.

They will lead a hatred-free and calm life, giving a halt to their destructive activities.

The poet clarifies that his wish should not be considered as a case for "total inactivity". He only wants to interrupt the sad, cruel and baleful activities of the world for a few moments and make the people introspect their actions. In fact what he says is connected with life, not with death. Activity is very essence of life. Inactivity is death but for a fresh, better and useful activity, a little stillness is essential.

The poet uses the image of the earth to show how life exists in seemingly dormant things. In winter, the earth becomes so still and silent that it seems to be dead. But later in spring, it seems to be lively again. It has new beauties and colours added to it. Similarly, after a little quietness and silence, man can resume his activities in a fresh and better manner.

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

1. Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still.

Questions

(a) Why does the poet ask us to count to twelve?

(b) Why does the poet ask us to keep still?

(c) Find words from the passage which mean.

(i) say number (ii) quiet and motionless.

Answers:

- (a) There are only twelve signs on the clock to measure hours. Therefore, the poet asks us to count till the clock measures these hours.
- (b) Too much activity and rush has only brought misfortunes to mankind. Hence, it is better to be quiet and still.
- (c) (i) count (ii) still

2. For once on the face of the Earth let's not speak in any language, let's stop for one second, and not move our arms so much.

Questions

- (a) 'Let's not speak in any language', says the poet. Why?
- (b) What should we not do for a second?
- (c) What do you understand by 'the face of the Earth'?

Answers:

- (a) The people of the world have been indulging in wars and bloodsheds on minor excuses. If they keep quiet, they may not indulge in reasoning, disputes and quarrels. So, let them keep quiet and not speak in any language. This will ensure peace and prosperity.
- (b) We should cease all activities for a second. Man has used his arms only to kill and destroy others. Therefore, let them not move their arms so much as to harm others.
- (c) The expression "the face of the Earth" refers to the various countries on the surface of the earth.

3. It would be an exotic moment without rush, without engines, we would all be together in a sudden strangeness.

Questions

- (a) What will happen if there is no rush or running of engines?
- (b) What sort of moment will it be?
- (c) How would all of us feel at that moment?

Answers:

- (a) There will be peace all around if there is no rush or the sound of the running of engines and machines.
- (b) It will be a very enticing and beautiful moment.
- (c) All of us will enjoy the sudden strangeness of that moment.

4. Fishermen in the cold sea would not harm whales and the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands.

Questions

- (a) What do fishermen usually do in the cold sea?
- (b) What does the poet ask fishermen not to do?
- (c) What has happened to the man gathering salt?
- (d) What should the man gathering salt do?

Answers:

- (a) Fishermen usually catch fish, particularly whales, in the cold seas.
- (b) The poet asks fishermen not to hurt or injure the whales in the seas.
- (c) The man gathering salt has injured his hands.
- (d) He must take care of his hurt hands.

5. Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victory with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their
brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

Questions

- (a) Name the poem and the poet of these lines.

(b)What sort of wars are mentioned in the above lines?

(c)What kind of victory will it be?

(d) How should the lovers of war behave?

Answers:

(a)The name of the poem is Keeping Quiet. The poet is Pablo Neruda.

(b)Green wars, wars with poisonous gases and wars with the fire are the different kinds of wars.

(c) It will be a victory where no survivors will be left to celebrate it. Such a victory will be meaningless.

(d) They should put on clean clothes and walk with their brothers under the trees doing nothing.

6.What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity. i Life is what it is about;
I want no truck with death.

If we were not so single-minded

about keeping our lives moving,

and for once could do nothing,

perhaps a huge silence

might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death.

Questions

(a)What does the poet want? What should it not be confused with?

(b)Explain: I want no truck with death’.

(c)What do people pursue single-mindedly? Which is the better course the poet suggests?

(d)When can a huge silence do us good?

Answers:

(a)The poet is advocating for silence or stillness. Stillness should not be confused with total inactivity.

(b)Total inactivity brings death. The poet refuses to associate (or deal) with death. Thus, he is not advocating for death.

(c)People pursue single-mindedly on keeping their lives moving. ..The poet suggests that it would be better if they give themselves rest for sometime. For once they may do nothing.

(d)A huge silence can do us a lot of good when we are disappointed at not understanding ourselves .

7. Perhaps the Earth can teach us as when everything seems dead and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve

and you keep quiet and I will go.

Questions

(a)What can the Earth teach us?

(b)What remains alive when everything seems dead?

(c)What does the poet want to do?

(d)What does the poet ask us to do?

Answers:

(a) The earth can teach us a lesson how to live on it.

(b) Only the earth remains alive when everything seems dead.

(c) The poet wants to count upto twelve.

(d) He asks us to keep quiet while he is counting upto twelve.

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK

Q1. What will counting up to twelve and keeping still help us achieve?

Ans: Counting up to twelve and Keeping still gives us a momentary pause to introspect and review the course of action. It is generally observed that most of the ills and troubles of the world are caused by our rush or hurry. Violence is caused by anger. Keeping quiet and still will give us peace.

Q2. Do you think the poet advocates total inactivity with death?

Ans: No, he doesn't advocate either total inactivity or death. He makes it quite clear that 'stillness'

should not be confused with “total inactivity. Total inactivity brings death. But Neruda has ‘no truck with death’. His stillness means halting of harmful and hostile human activities.

Q3. What is the ‘sadness’ that the poet refers to in the poem?

Ans: Man’s sadness is formed out of his own actions and thoughts. It is quite ironical that man who understands so much fails to understand himself and his action. Rash actions prove harmful and disastrous. Man is the creator of all disasters. He is always threatening himself with death because of his thoughts and actions.