

Poem 3: Keeping Quiet

Gist of the poem:

- The poet talks about the need of silence and quiet introspection and the importance of quietude and calmness. He also talks about creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human beings.
- The poet asks us to keep still and count up to twelve. He also asks us to sit still. For a moment we should not speak any language. We should not move our arms so much.
- It will be a moment of complete silence without rush or worry. This would be an exotic moment.

- Then a sudden strangeness will prevail which we will all enjoy. It will be bliss.
- The fisherman would not harm the whales on the cold sea. Even the man gathering salt would stop working and look at his hurt hands and reflect at the pain and harm his strenuous task has caused him.
- All kinds of wars must be stopped at once. The green wars against the environment, wars with poisonous gases, firearms, must be stopped at once.
- People who are all the time preparing for wars leaving no survivors behind ought to find time to wear clothes and walk around with their brothers strengthening the message of peace and brotherhood.
- At the same time the poet cautions not to confuse stillness with total inactivity. Life is an ongoing process and should not be associated with death. It is to be lived with positive attitude.
- He does not want us to ruminate over death.
- But he feels that if for once we do not focus ourselves single-mindedly to keep our lives moving but do some introspection or spend some time in silence doing nothing, we can understand ourselves better and escape from the threatening calls of death.
- The earth can teach us a lesson how everything comes to a dead end and comes to life again.
- In the same manner a quiet introspection can bring all evil thoughts to an end and bring in a new life of peace and tranquility.
- Now the poet will count up to twelve and they should keep quiet and he will go.

SOLVED QUESTIONS

1. Read the stanza and answer the questions that follows:

*“Fishermen in the cold sea
Would not harm whales
And the man gathering salt
Would look at his hurt hands.”*

- a) What is ‘fisherman’ symbolic of?

The fisherman symbolizes man’s indiscriminate exploitation of nature for his vested interests.

- b) What will happen when fishermen do not harm whales?

The whales will be no longer on the verge of extinction. A sense of co-existence can go into the minds of people.

- c) What has happened to the man gathering salt? What must he do?

The man gathering salt has injured his hands. He must take care of his hurt hands and should realize that his actions are self-destructive.

d) What would happen in this moment of silence?

He will become conscious of the harm causing to others and to themselves and will work towards a better tomorrow peace , co-existence, mutual understanding and harmony.

e) What image does the poet create in the last line?

He creates the image of incessant suffering. In his effort to add comforts to his life he has paid no heed to the pain that caused him.

2. Read the stanza and answer the questions that follows:

*" Perhaps the earth can teach us
As when everything seems dead
And later prove to be alive
Now I'll count up to twelve
And you keep quiet and I will go."*

a) Who can teach us and what?

The earth can teach us. The Earth can teach us how new life emerges from the ashes of the dead remains. Likewise quiet introspection will enable us to live a life of peace and harmony.

c) Why does the speaker count up to twelve?

It is a part of initiation in meditation. All distractions and digressions are washed away and man is in a moment of bliss.

d) Explain- 'you keep quiet and I will go'?

The poet wants us all to keep quiet and experience the moment of realization and peace. He will go and pass on the message to another group of people.

Short Answer Questions

1. Why does Pablo Neruda urge us to keep still?

Stillness is necessary for reflection and quiet introspection. We can hear the voice of our conscience and thus withdraw ourselves from undesirable actions and contribute to create a society of peace and mutual understanding.

2. 'Under the apparent stillness there is life'. Justify.

The poet does not want to equate stillness with total inactivity. Under the apparent stillness there is life. We can learn it from the earth when everything seems dead, the earth still remains alive. The life on earth goes on under the apparent stillness.

3. Why do men become sad? How can this sadness be overcome?

Men fail to understand themselves. They are always threatening themselves with death. When they do not understand themselves they become sad. A long silence might interrupt this sadness and make them good.

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

*“What I want should not be confused
With total inactivity
Life is what it is about
I want no truck with death.”*

1. What is the desire of the poet?
2. What does ‘total inactivity’ imply?
3. Why does the poet say that he does not want his wish to be confused with total inactivity?
4. Explain-‘I want no truck with death’.

*“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. ”*

- a). Whom does ‘those’ refer to here?
- b). Explain ‘green wars, wars with gas , wars with fire.’
- c).What does the poet mean by ‘victory with no survivors’?
- d).What would happen when men ‘put on clean clothes’?
- e).What lesson will man learn when he just walks about with his brothers doing nothing?

*“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.”*

- a). Who does ‘we’ refer to here?
- b). What is man ‘single-minded about’?
- c). Explain ‘keeping our lives moving’
- d).How would man benefit if he does nothing and keep quiet?
- e). What is the sadness of ‘never understanding ourselves’?
- f). How has man threatened himself with death?

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Why shouldn't we speak any language and move our arms so much?
2. How does the poet distinguish 'stillness' from 'total inactivity'? Explain.
3. "I want no truck with death." Explain.
4. What are the various wars mentioned? What is the result of these wars?
5. What would be the result of quietude?
6. What is the 'exotic moment' mentioned in the poem and how can we achieve it?
7. What has man single-mindedly focused on and to what effect?