



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	2021 – 2022
Question Bank	Topic: KEEPING QUIET - PABLO NERUDA	Note:

Theme

The poet, Pablo Neruda, advises us to be silent for some time during our busy, frustrated, insecure and selfish life. He promises us lasting peace of mind and endless happiness that we have never experienced in our lives. Shut up! This is what he asks us to do.

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

1. What is the significance of 'counting to twelve?'

Twelve is an extended counting. While counting for a longer time one feels more relaxed than counting for a short time such as one or three. As the counting is followed by a relaxed time of silent meditation, one needs to keep his mind at ease by counting steadily for a longer time.

2. Why does the poet ask his hearers to stop using any language?

Languages help us to communicate with other people. As the poet wants this time of silence for talking to oneself, not for talking to other people, he doesn't want us to use any language.

3. Why does the poet ask his hearers to make no movements of the arms?

Like any language, movements of arms can also communicate with other people. The poet wants his hearers to stop all sorts of communication with others to achieve a silent meditation and therefore he asks his hearers to stop any movements of the arms.

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

1. How does the time of silent introspection become an exotic moment for us?

The result of a silent introspection of this kind guarantees a perfect peace of mind. When this peace is achieved through silence, the happiness it provides is equal to no other happiness. It is exotic, strange moment.

2. What does the poet mean by 'rush?'

Rush means the rush that people make to defeat others, to reach before the others reach and the rush for achievements.

3. What sort of 'togetherness' can we experience while keeping quiet?

By keeping quiet we are able to understand our true self and its limitations. We realize how selfish we are and wipe out our ego through meditation. By eliminating a vast world of ego we give room for our brothers and feel a new togetherness.

4. What does the poet mean by the sudden strangeness?

By stopping all activities that one has been doing without pause, one feels a sudden silence and peace of mind which leads to a complete strangeness. When one starts feeling this silence, peace and togetherness, it appears sudden and strange.

**Fisherman in the cold sea would not harm whales
And the man gathering salt would look at his hurt hands...**

1. What does 'fisherman' symbolize?

Fisherman is a symbol to represent the people of the world, who can rule the people and exploit nature for their own benefits. The poet requests them to stop their atrocities for a while and think about themselves.

2. Who are represented by the salt gatherers?

Salt-gatherer is another symbol, representing all the poor/crushed people of the society. His hands are hurt and wounded while collecting salt, ie, working hard to make a living.

3. What should the salt-gatherer do at the time of silence?

The salt-gatherer has to look at his miseries and accept his state of being. A life that doesn't accept itself is always sad. He has now time to look at himself and take care of himself.

**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.**

1. What are green wars?

We use our deadly weapons to kill the mother earth, to destroy our nature and environment. We have poisonous gases and explosives to kill the earth.

2. Why is victory without survivors?

Anyone can fight, kill and destroy. Anyone can defeat and be victorious. But no one can enjoy the victory of his wars. It is ironical to have a victory without any survivors.

3. What does the poet want in the place of wars?

It is not war we want. We want peace. It is time to hate wars and destruction. It is time to walk peacefully with everyone whom we call enemies.

**What I want should not be confused with total inactivity.
Life is what it is about;**

1. What confusion, does the poet fear, has been created by him in his readers' mind? Or, What misunderstanding does the poet want to clear?

The poet at this point fears that his readers might take him wrongly. He makes it very clear that he is not talking about inactivity but activity. He wants his listeners to keep silent and be inactive only for some time.

2. Explain, 'life is what it is about.'

The poet reminds us that life is meaningful only in activity. We are all concerned only about our own lives. Life is an ongoing process and everything and everyone should be moving at all time.

**I want no truck/agreement with death.
If we were not 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...**

1. What does "truck with death" mean? Why does the poet not want a truck with death?

Truck with death means an agreement/ association with death. The poet believes that man has a tendency to get the help of death when he is surrounded by sadness and dullness. Poet doesn't want any agreement with death because he believes that introspection is the right way to get rid of our sadness, not death.

2. What happens when one is interrupted by silence?

When one is interrupted by silence, one gets time to introspect and thus get time to kill his ego and all the internal struggles caused by selfishness.

3. Which are the two prerequisites for achieving the interruption of silence?

The first prerequisite for achieving the interruption of silence is to keep our single-mindedness away while the other is to do nothing for a while.

4. When do people threaten themselves with death?

People tend to threaten themselves with the idea of committing suicide when they find themselves surrounded with sadness and inescapable dullness of mind.

Perhaps the earth can teach us

As when everything seems dead

And later proves to be alive.

Now I will count up to twelve

And you keep quiet and I will go.

1. What does the earth teach us about the significance of keeping silence?

The earth is full of examples that approve of the necessity to be silent. Everything keeps silent for some time in order to rejuvenate. Autumn dying in order to come fresh in the Spring season and seeds decaying to give life to a new plant, are examples for this.

2. What is the importance of the closing lines?

The poet concludes here. His instructions are completed. Now it is the time to put them in practice. He is going to start counting for his listeners at the end of what they are going to go silent and still. And you keep quiet and I will go. The process will begin soon. We will all keep silent as the poet has asked us to. We will introspect by diving deep into the abyss of our dark minds and find out great happiness that we have never experienced in our lives. We will then accept our limitations like the salt-gatherer, we will then stop harming others, we will finally cease to be selfish.