

Keeping Quiet



By Pablo Neruda

Class 12

Flamingo

The poem “Keeping Quiet” written by Pablo Neruda discusses the need of maintaining peace and silence. He stresses upon being quiet and harmless to the human beings, animals and environment. He suggests that in order to maintain peace and harmony, it is required to stop and introspect ourselves.

Stanza 1

The poet urges each one of us to count upto twelve and then be quiet. The poet might have used the phrase 'count to twelve' as there are 12 hours represented on a clock or as there are twelve months in a year. He might have wanted the people to keep still as long as they could. He wants a moment of silence on the Earth when no language is spoken. In this way, there will be no language barrier between people. No harsh words will be spoken. In this moment of silence, the poet doesn't want anyone to move their arms. He wants us to remain motionless.

Stanza 2

The poet feels that such a moment of silence would be an unusual and exciting one. It will have miraculous consequences. There will be no hurry or the sound of machines to pollute the atmosphere. It will be a strange and unfamiliar moment with stillness all around. In this unusual period, the bonds of humanity will get stronger.

Stanza 3

In this moment of inactivity, the fisherman would not be catching fish. Hence, the whales in the sea will be safe. This idea is suggestive of the thought that human beings would not destroy nature. The man who gathers salt will be able to tend to his wounded hands for which he had no time earlier. Thus, both nature and humans will be able to recover from their wounds.

Stanza 4

The poet now speaks of those who wage wars against humanity or environment, wars of all kinds, including the use of chemicals or poisonous gases, wars that bring death and destruction, wars that leave none to celebrate victory. He says that such men should stop their activity, shed their clothes stained with the blood of humanity, put on new clothes and walk with their brothers, building brotherhood. The poet implies that the war-torn world should be replaced by one with an atmosphere of peace, brotherhood and harmony.

Stanza 5

The poet makes a clarification that though he is advocating the need for silence, his advice should not be confused with total inactivity. He does not want any association with death. He says that life is meant to be lived.

Stanza 6

The poet further advises that people should stop being self-centred and selfish. For one moment they should not think of keeping their lives moving, meeting their ends or fulfilling their duties. That huge silence, which will arise from such a moment, will only serve to help the people. It will help them introspect and overcome their sadness of failing to understand themselves. People have been threatening themselves with death by their activities. This moment of silence will give them time to understand themselves better.

Stanza 7

The poet feels that the Earth can enlighten us and guide us in this process of keeping quiet. He wants us to observe that there is some activity under apparent stillness; for instance, a seed appears to be 'dead', but huge fruit-bearing trees are 'born' from such seeds lying 'dead' here and there. Finally, the poet thinks that he has said what he intended to. Now he wants us to keep quiet while he is counting to twelve, after which he will leave.