

Keeping quiet is a magnificent poem by Pablo Neruda which is based on the theme of universal peace and tranquility. 'Keeping Quiet' is a deceptively simple poem by Neruda about the exigency of self-analysis and introspection in building up a new world. The poem is a plea for peace from one who has seen the dire consequences of war and violence. ARMS can also mean weapons and moving arms (arms-hands) is the stock gesture of dictation and order of any political leader.

Pablo Neruda was critical of any kind of political or social oppression. His poem 'Keeping Quiet' is a call for introspection for all human beings, who have divided themselves on the basis of race, language and nationalities.

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

The poet says "now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still." here, the number twelve is a word that signifies order and completion

The poem begins on a note of meditation and introspection. through this expression, the poet commences the session of introspection. When stressed out or in dilemma, the best exercise is to keep quiet and calm. The poet uses the number twelve that probably represents the dial of a clock.

***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.***

The poet feels that if for once we'll keep quiet and still, it will provide us an opportunity to introspect on our follies. Moreover for those moments we will forget our differences and enter into the world of peace. Language breeds discrimination and linguistic chauvinism breeds dominance. If for sometime no one spoke on the face of the earth, all these discriminations will wither away in the depths of silence. Only then we will hear the voice of our conscience and feel rhythmic oneness of hearts. Here the poet is encouraging a unified movement among people, with no discrimination based on race or language. This would be a mass movement for the first time on the face of the earth, and would greatly enhance unity.

Let us stop for a moment and not move our hands so much in violence i.e. Let us not fight and argue so much. Man is a victim of his own doing. Much of the unrest on the earth is a result of man's so called progressive activities. If for sometime man stops moving his arms too much, peace and tranquility can prevail in the world. Man's silence and inactivity will prove to be a boon for mankind. All distinctions on the basis of language and nationality will disappear and man will not involve himself in the rat race if he is silent and inactive. All unnecessary misunderstanding, disputes and debates born out of different languages will come to an end.

The poet wants to promote peace and brotherhood in the world. As the harbinger of world peace, he feels that as long as men are always up and doing, differences and unrest will prevail in the world. Only when men keep quiet and spent time in introspection, will they be able to make amends.

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

It would be an exotic moment of immense world peace ,universal brotherhood and love created through introspection and silence . When men sheds away his differences and feels one with the soul of his fellow beings , he then feels that exotic moment of silence which can be a blessing for mankind. In this moment, man will become conscious of the harm he is causing to others and to himself. In this moment of inactivity all evils will come to an end.

It would be a splendid moment with reduced industrial activity (engines). The silence or the peace would form the common link between all of us, bringing us all together. `without rush, without engines'- the expressions are symbolic of the hubbub of life. In the modern competitive world of advancement there is a rat race to outshine others. Life can be peaceful only if this thoughtless advancement can be stopped.

Man can be brought together in that exotic moment of tranquility when all discriminations of man by man can be wiped away from the world and unrest caused by war come to an end.

The exotic moment of introspection will build a sudden and strange feeling of brotherhood .This moment of brotherhood and togetherness will be new and inexplicable. In other words, in the moments of introspection, he will realize the strength of mankind and togetherness of his race.

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

Fishermen symbolize men's indiscriminate exploitation of nature for his vested interest. It is therefore a cry for the oppressed. In this quiet moment of introspection, people would stop hurting others in an attempt to understand themselves. The whole of humankind is in a mad rush to finish off their existence and achieve whatever goals they set. People are so occupied with the daily rush of things and the flurry to accomplish their various goals that they never take the time to look into themselves and understand themselves. Mankind has been personified as the salt gatherer in the poem. The poet creates an image of man's incessant suffering. In his effort to add comforts to his life he pays no heed to the pain he has been causing to his own self and to nature. In an exotic moment of peace, people would finally slow down and look into themselves in an act of introspection, identify their follies and rectify them, making them better human beings.

***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.***

Those refers to the statesmen and the scientists who are involved in initiating and aggravating wars. `green wars,wars with gas, wars with fire' refers to the chemical wars which man is waging against man and nature chemical wars which man is waging against man and nature. Man's activities are polluting the nature and chemical and nuclear weapons created by him have brought mankind to his dead end. Men's activities are indeed them towards their doom. The wars which man is waging against nature will one day convert this living planet into a dead one and human beings will become an extinct species.. The war may be a victory of man's scientific knowledge but there could be no survivors to celebrate this victory.

When man put on clean clothes (without bloodshed) and for sometime do not involve in any activity they would reflect inwardly and thus halt their destructive activities. The poet uses this as a metaphor for cleansing the soul, mind and hearts of ill- feeling, hatred and violence. There should be sympathy for. People should rest peacefully in the quiet shade of trees.

When man can wear clean clothes and walk around leisurely, he will realize the strength and become conscious of universal brotherhood.

“Victory with no survivors” is a paradox. People who win a war claim to possess victory; but is that so? Have they not lost precious lives in the process? How then can they claim to have had victory? All wars originate from the lack of self-understanding, and the understanding that all individuals are equal, which is why the poet stresses on introspection. There can be two interpretations drawn out from the last few lines of the paragraph. One interpretation expounds that the people responsible for wars such as politicians, scientists, trigger the war and later stay in the shade walking hand in hand with the rival as brothers, while thousands of lives are lost in the battle. Another explanation is that people are never happy to go to war. They realize the absurdity of victory from war. As a result of this reflection, People can be friendly as brothers, and walk about in the shade doing no violence.

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

Total inactivity’ implies to a phase of complete stagnation where no activity is taking place on the face of the earth. He wants him to continue with his positive and constructive activities for the good of mankind.

Life is an ongoing process and thus is all about being up and doing. Life cannot come to a standstill under any circumstances.

The poet’s words should not be confused with death or a state of complete dormancy. The poet’s message is about life and he does not want it to be related in any way to death. It is not a state of inactivity but rather of continued action at a slow pace.

***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.***

Man has targeted himself single- mindedly towards scientific progress and advancement. He is so focused to it that he pays no attention to the pros and cons of reckless progress and moves ahead without reflecting on the consequences . he does not realize that it is speed that is threatening his joys and life. The expression `keep ourselves going’ is a comment on modern man’s mechanical and busy life. Man in his rat race for materialism has sacrificed fulfillment of his emotional needs. He does not understand his own needs and has become sad and isolated. The arm’s race and man’s rapid advancement towards progress at the cost of nature has brought him on the verge of extinction.

As mentioned before, the basic concern of all human beings is being alive. Human beings are single-minded about survival. Human beings are in a mad rush to finish life and accomplish all their varied targets. If people could slow down for once and do nothing, the massive silence will intrude the despair of never appreciating or recognizing ourselves. When we look around, all we see is an extremely pathetic condition wherein people are only concerned or afraid of dying and never of understanding themselves. Death is a threat to many of us because it means that we will not be able to fulfill all the targets that we create. We will not be able to accomplish the task of survival in peace.

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

The earth can teach us the lesson of preserving and resurrecting life .Earth teaches us how new life emerges from the ashes of the dead remains. Life is an eternal and ongoing process . Man is caught in the cycle of death. New life is believed to rise from the dead remains. The irony in these lines is that when the earth looks dead and it seems there is no activity taking place it is actually then that the seeds of life are germinating and the sprouting takes place. Similarly if we slow now to relax in silence and introspect, it will be truly enlightening moment as the true meaning of life and cause of our unhappiness will be known to us.

This paragraph is possibly empathetic toward human beings, persuading them to take a lesson from nature. During winter, the earth is blanketed with a coat of ice, and it appears as though there is no life in the environment. Even the air is frigid (frosty) and draughty. However, this is not the end and this does not last for long. The earth gets itself refined of all these trivial discrepancies, counting them all as a part of the rejuvenation process. Despite all natural disasters and calamities, the earth continues its journey. After a certain period of time, the cycle of reconstruction continues. The earth rejuvenates itself and moves on, alive once again.

***Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.***

Counting is a part of an exercise in meditation, When the leader counts upto twelve , the meditator reaches the point of ecstasy where all destructions wither away and the man is lost in that ecstatic moment. Thus the speaker counts upto twelve to make the meditators experience ecstasy.

The poet asks men to keep quiet and experience the ecstatic moment of silence which creates rejuvenation of thoughts and transition of mindset .He quietly departs leaving the meditators in an exotic moment.

Maintaining a third person viewpoint to the entire dilemma, the poet leaves us on a train of thought. Now that he has passed on the message, his work is done and he quietly leaves the scene.

The poet concludes the poem on the serene and pious note leaving the listeners in an ecstatic and exotic moment of peace.

The poem is written in a blank verse.

The **title** is quite logical. It suggest the necessity of quiet introspection. The people of the world are overactive and always on a move. Their activities have caused troubles and sufferings. Keeping quiet will do them a lot of good. It will save them from many harmful and violent

activities. It will help in reflecting over the fate of man and help in creating a feeling of mutual understanding among human being.

There are twenty-four hours in a day in all, with twelve hours for a half a day. The hours are numbered from one to twelve for both the ante meridiem (a.m.) half of the day and the post meridiem (p.m.) half of the day. 12:00 after a.m. and before p.m. (in the middle of the day) is midday or noon, and 12:00 after p.m. and before a.m. (in the middle of the night) is midnight. A new day is considered to start with the stroke of midnight. Furthermore, the basic units of poet may have used 'twelve' for no reason.

What is significant about "twelve" in the poem? Time (60 seconds, 60 minutes, and 24 hours) can all perfectly divide by twelve.

In scripture we find twelve associated with rule. The sun which rules the day and the moon and stars which govern the night move through the twelve signs of the zodiac. The zodiac resides in the great circle of the heavens, which is itself 360 degrees (= 30 x 12).

The Heavenly City of Revelations has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes on them. Twelve angels stand at the gates; the walls have twelve foundations garnished with twelve precious stones, and in them the names of the twelve apostles. The city is twelve thousand furlongs square, and the twelve gates are twelve pearls. The number twelve is used here symbolically of God's perfect government.

The importance of 12 in Judaism and Christianity can be found in the Bible. The Twelfth chapter of the Bible starts with God calling Abram to come out of the land he was living in and go where God would tell him. This is the beginning of God's plan to call out a nation unto him, that would be ruled by God and be a testimony to all the nations of the earth of the one true God. Here we can see the link between perfect government and the number twelve. There are 12 days of Christmas. Most calendar systems have twelve months in a year. At twelve, the hands of a clock are one. It is Oneness that the poem calls for. Count the letters in the title "Keeping Quiet", there are twelve.

Literary Device

Pun –Arms –refers to arms and also to the weapons

Metaphor-Fisherman, Earth

Symbolism-clean clothes

Paradox-victory with no survivors

Alliteration- sudden strangeness, hurt hands; clean clothes;