

# ENGLISH



# KEEPING QUIET

~Summary~

-by Pablo Neruda

## Stanza- 1

"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."

**Explanation:** 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

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

**Explanation:** 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**

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

**Explanation:** 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**

"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."

**Explanation:** 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**

"What I want should not be confused

with total inactivity.  
Life is what it is about;  
I want no truck with death."

**Explanation:** 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

"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."

**Explanation:** The poet further advises that people should stop being self-centered 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

"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."

**Explanation:** 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.