

A Psalm of Life Poem 2 Summary Poetry English

Class 10th

Introduction

A Psalm of Life by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is an inspirational poem that urges the readers and audience to attain a positive attitude towards life and live the present to the fullest instead of regretting the unchangeable past or dreaming about an uncertain future.

In the poem, the poet disapproves of the ideals of those who consider life miserable, meaningless, and waste. Instead, he asks everybody to have a set goal and work hard to achieve it. In this way, one will be able to live in the hearts of people even after one's death. The poem is divided into nine stanzas having four lines each. The rhyme scheme of the poem is ABAB.

Meaning

Before moving on to the summary, let us try to understand the title of this poem. The poem is entitled *A Psalm of Life*. Psalm means a sacred song or hymn or prayer (usually contained in religious books). In this poem, psalm means a lesson or advice (which is of course not a religious one) in the form of a song. *A Psalm of Life* means 'an inspirational song of life'.

Poem

Stanza 1

At the very beginning of the poem, the poet disapproves of the idea put in the **mournful numbers** i.e. sad poems that **life is** nothing **but an empty dream** i.e. hollow and meaningless like the dream.

For him, the soul of those who **slumber** i.e. sleep (or in other words those who consider life as a meaningless dream) is **dead**. And what such a person may see is not the reality. Or in other words what the pessimists and those who curse life see are different from reality.

Stanza 2

According to the poet, **life is real** and **earnest** (passionate) and **graves** i.e. dying (as the pessimists believe) **is not** the **goal** of life. One who said that dust thou art (from dust you are born) and **to dust returnest** (to dust we have to go i.e. we will have to die) was not a man with a purpose.

Note that this line is often quoted by religious persons and the poet is highly critical of them. For him, such people are without goals and passion. They do not have a reason to live life.

Stanza 3

According to the poet, neither **enjoyment** nor **sorrow** is one's **destined end or way** i.e. everlasting or the end goal. These two emotions are temporary but part of life. One should never take them seriously. Instead, one should make a balance between the two and start working hard so that **each to-morrow** i.e. the coming days would be far better than the present one.

Stanza 4

Art here means work. **Fleeting** means running away. According to the poet, time is running fast and the work is too much. **Though our hearts** are **stout** (strong) and **brave** yet **like muffled** (not loud) drums they beat **funeral marches to the graves** i.e. keep thinking about death. This fear or thought of death cannot be forgotten.

Stanza 5

In the fifth stanza, the poet considers the world as a vast battlefield. And we humans are **in the bivouac of life** i.e. temporary camps. The situation is of "do or die". We do not have any other option. Hence on the battlefield, we should not be **dumb** (empty-headed) and **driven cattle** (a domestic animals) which is like a slave. We should never be like such an animal. Instead, we should be **a hero in the strife** i.e. battle, and try our best.

Stanza 6

The poet says that we should not **trust the future** i.e. we should never think of a better future all the time and also **let the dead past** (which is gone) **bury its dead** i.e. take away bad thoughts with it. Instead, we should **act** now – **in present**. For that, we should believe in the **heart within** (ourselves) **and** have faith in **God** who is with us (**o'erhead**).

Stanza 7

According to the poet, the story **of great men all** tells **us** that **we can** also **make our lives sublime** i.e. awesome. After **departing** (dying), they have left their **footprints** (inspirational stories) **on the sand of time** (history). Thus are still alive and inspiring the coming generations.

Stanza 8

The poet urges us to make similar footprints i.e. make our lives inspiring so that someday another person who comes *sailing over life's solemn main* (from the ocean of sorrows). He may be *forlorn* (alone) *and shipwrecked* (sufferer). Our stories will inspire him to give up dejection and begin his journey toward success again.

Stanza 9

In the final stanza, the poet says that *let us be up* (get ready) *and* start working with *a heart* (full dedication) without thinking of *fate* (success or failure). We should have a belief in ourselves and a goal to achieve. We should be always working hard to pursue the goal. We should have learned to work hard and to keep patience.