

Chapter 10. A Psalm of Life [Poem]

Passage 1

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Whom is the poem addressed to? What kind of approach does the poet have towards life? How do we know this?

Answer:

The poet HW Longfellow addresses this poem to all his readers in general. He has a positive and motivational approach towards life. He urges us to wake up from our slumbers and make our lives meaningful. He tries to explain to us that we have got the gift of life not to lay stagnant and take it to our graves. He further states that our lives will not unfold by itself and it is up to us what we make of it.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

According to the speaker, what is not the goal of life? When will our soul really be dead?

Answer:

According to the speaker, dying without achieving anything is not the goal of life. Our soul will really be dead if we ignore our duties, not see things for what they really are and let ourselves slumber away to our ends.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Mention and explain the biblical references in the extract above.

Answer:

The word 'numbers' in the first line of the poem refer to verses in the bible. The phrase 'Dust thou art, to dust returnest' is also a biblical reference. In the book of Genesis, God reminded Adam that he was made from the dust of the ground and that he shall return to dust.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Is the poet's view of life influenced by Christian ideologies? Support your answer with phrases from the poem.

Answer:

Yes. The poet makes direct references to words in the bible (the second last line of the extract) to support his ideas. Also, other ideas like doing one's duties, suppressing laziness and helping ones brother etc are influenced by Christian ideologies.

Passage 2

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

What should we aim to achieve as we live each day?

Answer:

As we live each day, we should aim to move forward on our paths towards our goals instead of wasting our time on enjoyment or sorrow.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

What does the speaker say about the human heart?

Answer:

The speaker says that though human hearts are stout and brave their beating is like a warning to each one of us that our end is nearing.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;

But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

Why does the poet call art 'long'?

Answer:

The poet calls art 'long' because once it is created it will never perish. It is timeless and immortal unlike human lives which will decay or perish.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

Explain the line 'Funeral marches to the grave.'

Answer:

The steady beating of the human heart is likened to the constant beat of the drums in a funeral march in the line above.

Passage 3

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, how e'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!

Act,- act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'er head!

How does the poet want readers to face their battles?

Answer:

The poet wants readers to face life's struggles like a soldier fights battles heroically. The poet calls life as the 'world's broad field of battle'.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, how e'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,- act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'er head!

What does the phrase 'bivouac of Life' mean?

Answer:

The phrase 'bivouac of Life' refers to life as a temporary shelter. It re-emphasises that we are on earth only for a limited period of time and whatever we wish for should be achieved while we are alive.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, how e'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,- act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'er head!

What advice does the poet give about the past and the future?

Answer:

The poet advises us not to be tied up to our past or get mingled in worries or anticipations of the future. For this he says "Trust no Future, how e'er pleasant! Let the dead Past bury its dead!"

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, how e'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,- act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'er head!

Explain the following lines from the extract.

Act,- act in the living Present!

Heart within, and God o'er head!

Answer:

In the last two lines the poet urges us to live and act in the present and burn our past. He also advises us to stop worrying about the future. He says that our past or our future cannot help achieve our goals. We can only rely or trust the heart within our bodies and our God above to give us strength to live each day.

Passage 4

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

What do sublime lives indicate? How do we know that we can make our lives sublime?

Answer:

Sublime lives indicate lives of great worth; 'Lives' which have achieved so much that they are looked up to and praised for these things. Learning from the example of the lives of many great leaders and people who have lived before us, we can be sure that it is not impossible to make our lives sublime or worthy of respect.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

How can our life experience be a source of inspiration to others?

Answer:

As we live, we should face the hardships in our path with determination. Only our will and persistence will help us overcome the obstacles. Also, when we overcome our perils confidently, others who face similar adversities will get courage through our example and succeed in life.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

What does 'Sailing o'er life's solemn main' indicate?

Answer:

The words 'solemn main' indicate tough times in life; times when a person is low and finds it difficult to cope with situations on his own.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

What is the symbolic value of the word 'brother' used in the second stanza?

Answer:

The poet uses the word 'brother' to highlight that selflessness is one aspect of a good and healthy life. Only when we treat others the way we want to be treated will we be able to grow personally. Being happy for someone else's success gives us a positive approach to life which in turn helps us in our strife.

Passage 5

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

What should we prepare ourselves for when we are 'up and doing'?

Answer:

While we are 'up and doing', in other words, when we are actively striving to achieve our goals we should also prepare our hearts for failure. We need to understand that not all efforts bear fruit. We have to accept this fact gracefully and take it in our stride as we move on in life.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

**Explain the last two lines of the stanza.
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.**

Answer:

In the last two lines, the poet says that we should work to achieve our goals in life and not while away time. We need to learn to work hard in life but also be patient enough to wait for the fruits of our labour.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow:

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

What kind of tone and language is used in the poem?

Answer:

In keeping with the name of the poem i.e. 'A Psalm of life' Longfellow uses a didactic tone to talk about life. The nine stanzas use allusions to the bible and different aspects of life which if kept in mind will help us live our lives more fruitfully.