Snake – By D.H. Lawrence

Answer The Following Questions Briefly.

1.) Why does the poet decide to stand and wait till the snake has finished drinking? What does this tell you about the poet? (Notice that he uses ‘someone’ instead of ‘something’ for the snake.)

Ans. Both the poet and the snake have come to the water-trough for water. While the poet wants to fill his pitcher, the snake is thirsty and wants to drink water. Thus the snake needs water more urgently than the poet. That is why the poet decides to stand and wait till the snake has finished drinking. Moreover, the snake had come first and the poet had come later. So the rule of the queue also demanded that the poet should wait for his turn. This act of the poet shows that he is a great animal-lover and treats animals also on a human level.

2.) In stanzas 2 and 3, the poet gives a vivid description of the snake by using suggestive expressions. What picture of the snake do you form on the basis of this description?

Ans. On the basis of the poet’s description, we get a vivid picture of the snake. Its skin is of yellow-brown colour. It is soft-bellied. It sips water drops while keeping its mouth straight. It has a ‘slack long body’. It has a forked tongue.

3.) How does the poet describe the day and the atmosphere when he saw the snake?

Ans. It was a very hot day (a hot, hot day). It was so hot that even the bowels of the earth were burning. The shade of the carob-tree was a spot of welcome relief.

4.) What does the poet want to convey by saying that the snake emerges from the ‘burning bowels of the earth’?

Ans. By using this phrase, the poet wants to convey an idea of the intensity of heat on that day. It was this heat that had forced the snake to come out of the burning bowels of the earth.

5.) Do you think the snake was conscious of the poet’s presence? How do you know?

Ans. No, I don’t think the snake was conscious of the poet’s presence. The leisurely way in which the snake acts shows that it had no idea of the poet’s presence. Had it known the poet was there, it would have shown some reaction at least. And even if it had seen the poet, it gave no importance to his being there. It looked at the poet only vaguely.

6.) How do we know that the snake’s thirst was satiated? Pick out the expressions that convey this.

Ans. ‘He drank enough And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken.’ These words show that the snake’s thirst was satiated.
7.) The poet has a dual attitude towards the snake. Why does he experience conflicting emotions on seeing the snake?

Ans. The poet feels an instinctive fascination for the snake. He thinks of him as a guest who has come to his place to quench his thirst. So he gives the snake all the regard of a guest. But his voice of education tells him that it is a poisonous snake. And this thought makes him lift a log and hurl it at the snake.

8.) The poet is filled with horror and protest when the snake prepares to retreat and bury itself in the ‘horrid black’, ‘dreadful’ hole. In the light of this statement, bring out the irony of his act of throwing a log at the snake.

Ans. The poet shows a dual attitude towards the snake. He likes the snake for its graceful movements. He treats the snake like one who has come to his place to quench its thirst. He treats it like a guest. But at the same time, his voice of education tells him that it is a poisonous snake. He picks up a log and hurls it at the retreating snake. Clearly, this action of the poet is ironical. He tries to kill someone for whom he had shown such deep hospitality.

9.) The poet seems to be full of admiration and respect for the snake. He almost regards him like a majestic god. Pick out at least four expressions from the poem that reflect these emotions.

The following expressions show the poet’s admiration for the snake:

1. ‘But must I confess how I liked him’
2. ‘How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet’
3. ‘For he seemed to me like a king’
4. ‘But even so, honoured still more I That he should seek my hospitality’
5. And looked around like a god”.

10.) What is the difference between the snake’s movement at the beginning of the poem and later when the poet strikes it with a log of wood? You may use relevant vocabulary from the poem to highlight the difference.

The snake’s movement in the beginning is very leisurely. It trails its yellow-brown slackness. It has a slack long body. It turns its head slowly and very slowly. But when the poet throws a log at it, the snake writhes like lightning and disappears.

11.) The poet experiences feelings of self-derision, guilt and regret after hitting the snake. Pick out expressions that suggest this. Why does he feel like this?
Expressions like the following express the poet’s feelings of self-derision, guilt and regret after hitting the snake: paltry, vulgar and mean. He feels like that because he had no reason to hit the snake. The snake had done him no wrong. Moreover, he knew that his voice of education was misleading. Still he allowed himself to led by it. That is why the poet is filled with regret.

12.) You have already read Coleridge’s poem, The Ancient Mariner, in which albatross is killed by the mariner. Why does the poet make an allusion to albatross?

Ans. The Ancient Mariner’s act of killing the albatross was similar to the poet’s act trying to hit the snake. The only difference was that the poet had missed his aim and the snake was saved. His purpose was no different from that of the Ancient Mariner. Both of them are filled with regret after the act.

13.) ‘I have something to expiate’ Explain.

The word ‘expiate’ means to feel sorry for some wrong that you have done and willing to accept punishment for it. The poet feels that he has done wrong trying to hit the snake. The snake had done him no wrong. It had simply come to drink water at his trough. It was like a guest to him, and yet he tried to hit him. The poet feels that he has done a sinful act and is willing to expiate for it.

The encounter with the snake and the dual response of the poet to his present at the water-trough reflect a conflict between civilized social education and natural human instincts. The poet writes a diary entry highlighting how was torn between the two voices. Write his diary.

Sunday, 9.30 p.m.

Today’s incident has left me pondering over what I am really. Do I know myself? Do I have a dual personality? Am I my natural self or am I what my so-called civilized social education has made of me. First, I look upon the snake as a guest. I appreciate its fine glossy body. I feel spellbound by its actions. But then, all of a sudden, as it begins to go back, I pick up a log and throw it at the snake. Why did I do that? Somewhere at the back of my mind was a thought that snakes are poisonous and dangerous. It was the voice of my civilized social education. I had been taught to fear snakes, but my inner natural self tells me that snakes have as much right to live as any other creature of nature, including human beings. There are so many men who are even more dangerous than snakes. Do we kill them, or do we have the right to kill them? The answer is clear. And henceforth, I shall try to be true to my natural inner self.

The poet has also used both repetition and similes in the poem. For example, ‘must wait, must stand and wait’ (repetition) and ‘looked at me vaguely as cattle do’ (simile). Pick out examples of both and make a list of them in notebooks. Give reasons why the poet uses these literary devices.

Examples of Repetition:
1. On a hot, hot day
2. And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream.
3. A sort of horror, a sort of protest

**Examples of Simile**

1. He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do
2. And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do
3. And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air
4. And looked around like a god

The poet has used the device of repetition for the greater effect and similes for purpose of making the description more vivid and pictorial.