**Night of the Scorpion**

About Nissim Ezekiel

Nassim Ezekial was born in Bombay in 1924 as part of Bombay’s Jewish community. He attended Wilson College in Mumbai and received a BA in Literature. After graduating he taught English literature, and continued his studies at Birkbeck College, London where he studied Philosophy. He was married, and published his first collection of poetry in 1952, The Bad Day. Another book, The Dead Man, was published in 1960. His career also included working in the publication industry, as a critic at The Names of India and editor of Poetry India. He also held a number of professorial positions at the University of Leeds and the University of Pondicherry. He would receive the Padmashri award by the President of India in 1988. He died in January of 2004 at 79 years old.

Summary and Analysis of "Night of the Scorpion"

In "Night of the Scorpion," the speaker tells a story from his childhood in which his mother was bitten by a scorpion. The poem begins with a simple declaration: "I remember the night my mother / was stung by a scorpion" (1-2). The scorpion had entered the speaker's home because it wanted to hide from the rain. When it bit the speaker's mother, it was hiding beneath a sack of rice.

The speaker describes the incident in which the scorpion stings his mother without mentioning his mother at all. Instead, he focuses on the scorpion and what he did immediately afterward: "Parting with his poison—flash / of diabolic tail in the dark room— / he risked the rain again" (5-7). Rather than stick around and look at the scene he had caused, the scorpion ran back outdoors.

After the speaker's mother was bitten, the speaker notes that poor people went to his mother's side "like swarms of flies," buzzing with Christianity and hoping to kill one of their visions of Satan (8). The peasants look for the scorpion on their hands and knees with lanterns. Their wish is to find the scorpion quickly because they believe that every movement the scorpion makes without getting killed affects the speaker's mother: "With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's / blood, they said" (16-18).

The peasants begin to share good wishes for the speaker's mother, hoping that the scorpion will die that night, or at least sit still, that the sins of her past life will be burned away, and that she may return to an even better life in her next life because of her suffering.

The peasants continue making wishes for the speaker's mother, wishing that the forces of evil might be diminished by the speaker's mother's pain. They sat on the floor around the speaker's mother, hoping that the scorpion's bite would "purify" her, with "the peace of understanding on each face" (29).

As more people come to visit the speaker's mother, the speaker takes in his surroundings: "More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours, / more insects, and the endless rain" (30-31). The speaker's mother, oblivious to it all, spent this time suffering and twisting on a mat.

The speaker turns his attention to his father, who he describes as a "sceptic" and "rationalist" (34). The speaker notes that even his father is making an effort to help his mother in any way that he knows how, which means turning towards that which he wouldn't otherwise believe: "trying every curse and blessing, / powder, mixture, herb and hybrid" (35-36). The speaker's father even lit the bite on fire in an attempt to remove the poison.

The speaker's mother suffered for 20 hours. Her only response at the end of it all was her gratitude that it didn't happen to anyone else in their family: "My mother only said / Thank God the scorpion picked on me / And spared my children" (43-5).

Analysis

"Night of the Scorpion," which was published as a part of The Exact Name, demonstrates a new and emerging aesthetic in Ezekiel's poetry. Whereas his early poems conformed to a strict meter and rhyme, later poems like "Night of the Scorpion" adopts a natural, colloquial meter and tone. This poem was published in a time when Ezekiel was making a deliberate attempt at formal innovation by using a loose, seemingly free-verse structure for his narrative poems. Additionally, Ezekiel stopped putting capitals at the beginning of each line, which allows his later poems to flow much more easily on the page.

The fact that Ezekiel distances himself from formal poetic conventions does not imply a lack of care when it comes to the form of "Night of the Scorpion." In fact, Ezekiel makes deliberate choices about line breaks, enjambment, voice, chronology, and tone in this poem which gives it the effect on the reader that made it so famous to begin with. There is only one line break in this poem, which occurs right after the speaker's mother is released from her suffering:

"After twenty hours it lost its sting.

My mother only said thank God the scorpion picked on me

and spared my children" (44-48).

This line break is a literal break in the tension of the poem and endows the conclusion with a quiet depth. The tension in the poem before the line break comes from two sources: first, that the speaker's mother is suffering with little prospect of relief, and second, the tension that the speaker holds between personal crisis and mocking social observation.

While the personal crisis is clearly on the surface of the poem, the mocking social commentary is evident through the speaker's tone. The speaker in the poem, who inhabits a perspective between the little boy watching his mother suffer and the older man looking back upon that memory, relays the events of the crisis in a calm and detached manner. The casualness with which the speaker relays this scene is incongruous and even alarming for the reader. Even so, the speaker moves slowly through the events of the poem in one long stanza without breaks—unhurried and, it seems, unbothered. This emotional detachment lets the poem speak directly to the reader, who understands right away what Ezekiel means without having to juggle emotional pain over the suffering mother.

When the speaker addresses the peasants, we find a tone that we often see in the Collected Works—Ezekiel's sardonic and mocking gaze, which is the gaze of an insider that is nonetheless distanced from his subject. In this poem, Ezekiel's irony dramatizes the peasant's, as well as the speaker's father's, superstition in their desperate attempts to save the speaker's mother. The speaker does not see the peasants in a positive light and instead compares them to "swarms of flies" in their desperation to help his mother (8). Their mixture of Christianity and Hinduism allows for slight confusion, as they pray to God for the mother's wellbeing yet also hope for the best in her reincarnations. The speaker highlights how futile their spiritual efforts were in helping his mother: "My mother twisted through and through / groaning on a mat" (32-33). While this perspective does reflect a slight elitism—the speaker is looking down on the peasants for believing what they believe—it also indicates the religious and cultural diversity that India holds. In this way, "Night of the Scorpion" is a quintessentially Indian poem in that it shows the meeting of worlds through a sense of community ties after a specific disastrous event.

Though "Night of the Scorpion" does not use the strict formal structures that Ezekiel had used in his earlier poetry, this does not mean that the poem is not rhythmic or musical. The punctuation and enjambment of the lines cause the poem to flow in the large first stanza. This helps to build tension and make a large block of text easier and more pleasant to read. For example, the descriptions of the peasants looking for the scorpion contain an easy internal rhythm: "With candles and with lanterns / throwing giant scorpion shadows / on the sun-baked walls / they searched for him: he was not found" (11-14). These lines start out in an even rhythm (with CAN-dles and with LAN-terns), which is broken by the colon, and the depressing revelation that the scorpion was not found. In this way, the careful variation of rhythm throughout "Night of the Scorpion" helps Ezekiel achieve different emotional effects.

Finally, this poem communicates a tension between urban living and the natural world that Ezekiel returns to again and again in this work. The speaker's community, which lives close together and keeps itself informed about its residents, rose up in this work to surround the mother as she burned. The antagonist of the poem is the scorpion, who is forgiven by the speaker very early on since he was indoors simply for survival: "Ten hours / of steady rain had driven him / to crawl beneath a sack of rice" (2-4). In this way, the true force of chaos and evil is the rain, which drove the scorpion indoors and beats down upon the speaker and his family throughout their ordeal: "More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours, / more insects, and the endless rain" (30-31). Like "Monsoon Madness," the natural world is a force of its own in "Night of the Scorpion" and is directly responsible for all of the characters' troubles.

The Night of the Scorpion by Nissim Ezekiel

‘The Night of the Scorpion’ is an eight stanza poem, each stanza of which contains between three and eighteen lines. This is one of Ezekiel’s first poems, it was first anthologized in Collected Poems (1952-1988) The poem is free verse, meaning it does not contain a rhyme scheme. This choice adds to the seriousness of the poem’s subject matter and the deadly nature of the story Ezekiel tells.

The Night of the Scorpion by Nissim Ezekiel

Summary

‘The Night of the Scorpion’ is the story of one night in which the mother of the speaker is stung by a poisonous scorpion. She suffers for twenty hours while peasants, holy men, and her husband attempt to heal her. They try curses, blessings, prayers, herbs, and all forms of ancient medicine that are not practiced in most of the modern world. Their efforts are in vain. A sense of otherworldliness is created by the beliefs and practices of these peasants in comparison to the world in which the reader is existing, a barrier is put up. This barrier is torn down as the poem concludes and the reader realizes how similar they are to the characters in the poem, united by their common humanity.

Analysis of Night of the Scorpion

This poem begins at the beginning, with the speaker starting the story of how his mother was stung by a scorpion. Ezekiel does not use unnecessary phrasing or extra words, he gets right to the point. He describes how the scorpion had been driven inside by “steady rain” and has decided to hide beneath a “sack of rice.” This first stanza is only four lines, a choice Ezekiel makes to urge the story forward. A quick succession of stanzas allows for the poem to flow faster. The second stanza proceeds in the same way, but this time with only three lines.

In this stanza, Ezekiel’s speaker describes the actions of the scorpion. He portrays the creature as being purposefully diabolical, a thought that will directly relate to the beliefs and actions of those that attend the speaker’s mother. The scorpion moves quickly before anyone can do anything, he “part[s] with his poison…” and runs back outside, to risk the weather again.

Throughout this piece Ezekiel makes a number of language choices that continue to reference the movements and parts of different insects.These descriptors are very prevalent in the third stanza.He describes the actions of the peasants as being like swarms of flies, they “buzzed” God’s name in a hope to paralyze the “Evil One.”

The image that Ezekiel creates here is clear, the reader can easily visualize a swarm of people coming down on the speaker’s mother, all with good intentions, but perhaps so numerous that no one can do anything that would help. They are all devoted to the same purpose, praying in the hope of saving the mother. They believe that she has been inflicted by the Evil One, or the devil, and pray in an effort to drive him out.

The peasants came like swarms of flies and buzzed the name of God a hundred times

The fourth stanza contains seven lines and describes the hunt that the peasants embark on in an effort to find the scorpion. They search with both candles and lanterns, which throw shadows on the wall in the shape of a scorpion. This image of the scorpion still being in the room (only in the form of shadow) helps set the scene for the next lines as the peasants struggle to help the mother. The shadow is representative of their primitive fears, that something Evil is lurking just where they cannot see it.

This fourth stanza continues, and the search for the scorpion has failed, they do not know, as the reader does, that the scorpion fled the house at the beginning of the poem. This puts the reader in a position above those in the poem, he/she has a greater knowledge of the situation than those experiencing it. A technique that, on stage, or within drama, is known as dramatic irony.

The peasants say that,

With every movement that the scorpion made his / poison moved in Mother’s blood…

This gives the reader the sense that they believe if they are able to capture and kill the scorpion the mother will be cured. A simple, primitive belief, that the reader would very well know to be unfounded. Once again elevating the reader’s position above that of the peasants.

The fifth paragraph, also seven lines, holds the poem’s momentum steady. The peasants wish the scorpion to be stilled, but offer a bit of consolation for the mother. They, deep in their superstitions, say to the mother that the poison will burn away the sins of her previous birth, and decrease the suffering of her next. This is a reference to the traditional Hindu belief of reincarnation. Due to their lowly social status it was believed that the mother must have committed some kind of grievous sin to be condemned to this life, and that perhaps this suffering she is going through will improve her chances of being reincarnated into a higher position in her next life.

This stanza continues into the next in which the speaker continues relaying the words of the peasants. They wish that the pain the mother is experiencing will purify her flesh,

of desire, and your spirit ambition,

The peasants have given up their search for the scorpion and are now sitting around the mother with her at the center of a circle. The speaker describes each peasant as wearing a face that is peaceful with understanding. The next two lines allow for quick progression of time. Ezekiel lists a number of developments and additions to the story. All of the following are added to the situation:

More candles, more lanterns, more neighbors, / more insects, and the endless rain.

The mother is “twisting” on the floor, “groaning” into the mat. It can be assumed that quite a large crowd has gathered around the mother. Many there to help, and probably some there just to observe. At this point in the story the father is introduced into the poem. He is described as being a very sensible man, rational, and a sceptic. Most likely doubtful of the beliefs of the peasants. At this moment though he is desperate. Ezekiel’s speaker describes his father as trying

every curse and blessing, / powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.

His father has forgotten his reason and is trying everything he can think of in an effort to save his wife. While the reader may have felt some distance from the characters at this point, the father’s desperation feels real and acute. A man hopeful beyond reason that a curse or blessing will save his wife. He even goes so far as to burn paraffin on her toe. The speaker watches the flames it creates “feeding” on his mother. Just as the poison is moving through her body, so is the flame consuming her skin. The reader is then informed that all of this has been going on twenty hours. A truly painful and horrific death.

Throughout this poem a number of different remedies are tried in an attempt to save the mother, from what the reader can infer, none of them help. Some of these practices will surely seem absurd to a modern reader. These references to older medicinal practices put distance between the reader and the speaker, especially in the final line of the seventh stanza in which a

holy man perform[s] his rites to tame the poison with an / incantation.

After this distance is in place, Ezekiel swiftly breaks down the barrier to show how truly similar the reader is, no matter where he/she is from, to the characters in the poem. They are all human and are united by the final stanza.

My mother only said / Thank God the scorpion picked on me / And spared my children.

While once again the scorpion is spoken about as if it chose to kill the mother, the mother’s dedication and pure love for her children breaches the gap between the characters in the poem and any reader. All can empathize with the love felt for a child, mother or father. This woman, although distant, living in a different time and place, is just as human and real as anyone reading the poem.

**1. What did the scorpion do?**

Ans. The scorpion concealed itself under a rice-bag as it was raining heavily outside for 10 hours. Then get the chance, it injected its venomous poison into the blood of the poet’s mother and left the shelter. But, its effects did not remain a bearable one to an old lady. The poet’s mother was screaming feeling endless agony. Her senses were paralysed by the scorpion’s poison, and she felt wordless pain. She was tossing in bed from one side to another in the pain of indescribable sufferings.

**2. What attitude of the peasants do you get in Ezekiel’s poem?**

Ans. Hearing the poet’s mother’s screaming, the neighbouring came running to her house and tried a frantic effort to spot out the whereabouts of the scorpion. But, they were superstitious and religious minded. They told that keeping unflinching faith in God; such troubles can be overcome. They also said the mother’s sufferings in the next life will be reduced for extra suffering in this life. Then the neighbours licked the path on which the scorpion had gone away. They also asserted, if the insect remained still, then the mother’s trouble would be relieved during that night. It is crystal clear that they always retain their firm belief in some supernatural power.

**3. What was the difference in the poet’s father?**

Ans. The poet’s father was a believer in science, and therefore, he was not at all moved by the sacred rites of the peasants. He attempted different medicines to mitigate the agony of his wife. He poured some kerosene on the injured part of her toe and then fired it to burn the poison quickly. Indeed, he was not at all unscientific in his attitude. He was out and out a rationalist and had a reasonable approach towards the possible hazards of life.

**4. What was the reaction of the mother after her recovery?**

Ans. The poet’s mother recovered from the wordless pain caused by the biting of the scorpion after 24 hours. After her relief, she expressed her holy wishes to God because it was her fortune that not her children but that scorpion stung her. The poet felt the nobility of his mother and realised the universal affection that is the only property of all the ladies in this universe is not absent in his mother who wants to die herself in exchange of her children’s lives.

**5. Describe the nature of the peasants.**

Ans. The peasants are superstitious by birth. But they have some superb qualities which make them uncommon. They are unselfish and cordial to their neighbours. To them, the pain of a neighbour is too much to bear. They come to help their neighbours at all times. They are not friends of good times only. While they heartily attempt to solve the troubles of anyone, at the same time they keep their unprecedented faith in the all-powerful power of God. They try to overcome any problem maintaining faith in God.

Enterprise by Nissim Ezekiel

‘Enterprise’, a poem by Nissim Ezekiel, has manifold layers on its actual meaning. Readers can interpret the poem in their own way. It being a well-written piece of art, welcomes various critical appreciations. Apart from the meaning of the text, the essence of Indianness is there in the poem. These elements make it so dear to the Indian readers. The language used in the poem isn’t so tough that one cannot understand the meaning after reading it for the first time.

Enterprise by Nissim Ezekiel

Explore Enterprise

1 Summary of Enterprise2 Form and Structure of Enterprise3 Literary Devices in Enterprise4 Analysis of Enterprise

Summary of Enterprise

‘Enterprise’ by Nissim Ezekiel is an allegorical poem describing the journey of life and the poet’s realization at different stages of his journey.

In ‘Enterprise’ the poet, Nissim Ezekiel talks about going on a pilgrimage. He is not alone in the journey. There are other pilgrims too in that group. They have set out to reach a destination that is unknown to the readers. It is not disclosed even at the end of the poem. There is a hint in the poem that the place is somewhere near the sea. The poet divides their journey into some stages. In each stage, the path they have chosen is not that smooth. They have to face some difficulties in order to reach their goal. Some members leave the group for their difference of opinion. One such person is an intellectual and prose writer.

The situation worsens when they are close to their destination. But the ending is paradoxical. Even after suffering from hardships to reach their coveted goal, they feel dejected after reaching there. At last, the poet paradoxically remarks, “Home is where we have to gather grace.”

You can read the full poem here.

Form and Structure of Enterprise

‘Enterprise’ by Nissim Ezekiel has a specific structure and rhyme scheme. The poet himself is the sole speaker in the poem. So readers can say it is a lyric poem. There are specific instances where the poet uses a first-person narrative technique to describe the journey.

The poem is 30 lines long. There are a total of 6 stanzas in the poem each containing 5 lines. The rhyme scheme is ABABA and it continues throughout the poem without any break.

If we scan the poem metrically we can find another regularity in the poem. The poem is written in iambic tetrameter. In a poem composed in Iambic tetrameter, contains 4 feet in each line and the stress falls on the second syllable of each foot. There is an important variation in the last line of the poem. It is justified as the poet is in a paradoxical mood at the end of the long journey. The last line is in trochaic pentameter and the last foot is catalectic. The falling rhythm at the end is significant as per the mental condition of the poet.

Literary Devices in Enterprise

The first line is an example of sarcasm. The poet says that their journey isn’t an ordinary one. It was like a pilgrimage for the group. It is meant to bring a sense of humor at the same time a smell of irony in the poem. There are some other instances where the poet uses the same literary device. Such lines are, “We stood it very well, I thought”, “On how to cross a desert patch” and “…I tried to pray”.

In the last line of the first stanza, the sun is personified. In the second stanza, “The way of serpents and of goats” is a metaphor. “Serpents” is a metonym of mischievous persons with whom the poet met during the enterprise. In the 4th stanza, readers can find another metonymy in the word “section”. Here “section” stands for the persons in the poet’s group. In the line “he smelt the sea”, the poet uses another metonymy. Here the sea symbolizes the sea breeze.

In the last stanza, Ezekiel invests the abstract idea “trip” with the ability to blacken their face. It is definitely a use of personification. The last two lines of the poem contain a deep meaning which seems absurd to the readers at this juncture of the poem. Here the poet uses a literary device which is called epigram in the art of rhetoric.

**Enterprise**

**Stanzas One and Two**

It started as a pilgrimage(…)

Three cities where a sage had taught

In the first stanza of ‘Enterprise’, Nissim Ezekiel says that their journey began as a pilgrimage. At the beginning of the journey, the poet’s mind was in an exalted state and all the burden of his life seemed nothing in comparison to his endeavor. At the second stage of the journey, the poet faced some difficulties but he wasn’t in the mood of leaving the journey in the middle.

In the second stanza, the poet makes it clear that he was alone on the journey. He was in a group of people who had the same goal in their minds. During the journey, the poet took a descriptive note of his surroundings. He came across different people in his way and he especially mentions a sage whom he saw preaching his lessons in three cities. After reading this stanza it becomes clear that the poet was much focused on the surroundings instead of thinking about his aim.

**Stanzas Three and Four**

But when the differences arose(…)

Our leader said he smelt the sea

Later in their enterprise, some differences of opinion arose among the team members “on how to cross a desert patch”. The matter was trivial but it made an intellectual of the group leave the journey. The poet says that the person was skilled in prose writing and was the best among the group.

The way was not smooth for the poet and his group. They faced difficulties from both sides. In the next phase of the journey, they were attacked twice and had lost their way. Some members of the group were so distressed that they couldn’t carry on the journey and they left. In such a condition the poet resorted to praying for gathering some hope.

**Stanzas Five and Six**

We noticed nothing as we went ,(…)

Home is where we have to gather grace.

There is a use of enjambment between stanza 4 and 5. So readers have to begin from the last line of the previous stanza to understand the whole meaning. In this stanza, the poet says that the leader of the group had gotten a hint of their destination which was near a sea. They didn’t find any such thing on their way. It brought more frustration in the poet’s mind and he was just left with a little ray of hope. In the course of their journey, they couldn’t even fulfill their basic needs. Here the poet sarcastically remarks that they were “Deprived of common needs like soap.”

At last, when they reached the place in their “broken” and “bent” state, they felt unsatisfied. The long and arduous journey seemed meaningless. They realized that their feat was “neither great nor rare”. At the end of the poem, Ezekiel ironically remarks, “Home is where we have to gather grace.”

‘Enterprise‘ by Nissim Ezekiel is one of those few Indian poems that have been subjected to a great deal of critical scrutiny. This poem is one of the best poems of Ezekiel.

The theme of the poem revolves around a metaphorical journey to a pilgrimage started by some enthusiastic people. The enterprise, though started in high spirit, faced some setbacks in the middle. Finally when they reached the destination they doubted the importance of that troublesome journey. They realized its futility and concluded: “Home is where we have to gather grace”. Thus the narrative poem ‘Enterprise’ delivers a great message. The poem is didactic.

Enterprise: language and form

About the language and form of the poem ‘Enterprise’, it employs very simple language as Nissim Ezekiel’s poems generally tend to do. The poem consists of only six stanzas of five lines each with a regular rhyme scheme of ABABA. And there is nothing extraordinary in the form or language of the poem, the main attraction being in the different interpretations of its meaning.

About the poet: Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel (1924 – 2004) was a Mumbai based Indian Jewish poet, playwright, actor and critic. He is often regarded as the father of modern Indian English poetry. He studied in Mumbai and also in London. His best known books include ‘Time to Change’, ‘The Discovery of India’, ‘The Unfinished Man’, ‘Hymns in Darkness’ and ‘Later Day Psalms’. He received the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1983 (for Later-Day Psalms) and Padmashri in 1988. To know more about the poet please go through this Wiki page.

**Enterprise by Nissim Ezekiel: Line by line analysis**

Here we go for a detail line-by-line explanation and a commentary on the poem.

It started as a pilgrimage,

Exalting minds and making all

The burdens light.

At the very beginning of the poem ‘Enterprise’ the poet-speaker confirms that the journey, the main theme of the poem, started as a pilgrimage. Having said that, it had a noble aim and a lofty goal. All the members of the group were excited at the prospect of going out to a pilgrimage. The thought of a holy expedition elevated their minds and made all the burdens light. By the very nature of our minds when people are enthusiastic, the burdens seem to be lighter. That is why nothing could pose a challenge before them at that moment.

The second stage

Explored but did not test the call.

The sun beat down to match our rage.

So, the poet has divided the journey into stages. The second stage was somewhat different from the first one, since they faced the hostility of nature on the way. The sun, symbolic of the hostility of nature, was radiating (beat down) its scorching heat on them as if to match their spirit (rage) in intensity. Thus, the second stage gave them some tough moments (explored), but that was not enough to test their keenness. In short, though nature tried to present some obstacles, it hardly succeeded to unnerve them or pose a real threat.

One more thing to note here is that for the first time in the poem the poet/speaker has used a first person pronoun ‘our’ to indicate that he was a part of the group.

We stood it very well, I thought,

Observed and put down copious notes

On things the peasants sold and bought,

The way of serpents and of goats,

Three cities where a sage had taught.

The speaker thought that everything went well so far. Especially they could withstand the outrage of the sun. They also kept themselves busy observing and taking lengthy notes on various things the farmers were selling and buying, and on the ways of snakes and goats. They even observed the three cities where they saw a hermit teach his lessons.

In this stanza of the poem Enterprise, the poet has satirically described what they were doing during their journey. He actually indicates to how people gets distracted from the main mission. They were wasting their time and energy taking notes on the humdrum aspects of life and on curiosities which were certainly not their aim. Moreover, their concern was with rather unimportant things. They observed and took note on the cities without concerning themselves with what the sage had taught or what his message was.

But when the differences arose

On how to cross a desert patch,

We lost a friend whose stylish prose

Was quite the best of all our batch.

There came a stage when differences arose in their opinions. Some members didn’t agree with the others on crossing a patch of desert on the way. As a result, the best prose writer and intellectual person among them parted from the group.

So we see that a holy journey for a noble cause no longer holds its integrity. People are becoming egotistic and concentrating on trivial matters. Their main concern now is the way, not the ultimate aim. Even the seemingly intellectual did not bother to reconcile the differences and hold the members together. Ironically, he sought the easier way to part from the group.

A shadow falls on us — and grows.

After one friend left the group, a shadow of friction and conflict befalls the enterprise and continues to grow. They now lacked the zeal with which they started.

Another phase was reached when we

Were twice attacked, and lost our way.

In the next phase of the journey some local or external forces attacked them on the way. As a result, they lost their way. So, it seems that in the quest to save themselves they didn’t even bother that they were losing the way.

These are also symbolic. We human beings often face the opposition of fellow men on our way of life. Sometimes we lose our way by the hostility or misguidance of others. Moreover, when we find ourselves in trouble, we forget the larger perspective and run away to save our narrow interests.

A section claimed its liberty

To leave the group.

A section of the group wanted to free themselves and create a new group. Possibly they were unhappy with the leadership. So, the disagreement continues.

I tried to pray.

Our leader said he smelt the sea.

In that situation, the narrator had nothing to do but pray. He prayed that God might solve the issues. The group leader was helpless and tried to assure others by saying that they were near the sea, and so the destination was at hand.

We noticed nothing as we went,

A straggling crowd of little hope,

But it was a false hope from the leader. As they progressed, they could see nothing. They now looked like a group of aimless and hopeless wanderers.

Ignoring what the thunder meant,

Deprived of common needs like soap.

Some were broken, some merely bent.

They were too tired to understand what thunder meant. They were in such dire condition that they were deprived of common needs like soap. Ignoring the thunder may also mean that they ignored what their inner self suggested. They didn’t have any idea of what was happening around. Seemingly, they were exhausted and lost their faith by now. The entire enterprise was reduced to a motiveless, ritualistic exercise. They were physically drained too. Some members were not able to walk any more, and the others just bent down with pain.

When, finally, we reached the place,

We hardly knew why we were there.

After facing a lot of difficulties when they reached the destination, they wondered why they had been there. They did not find the journey meaningful at all.

The trip had darkened every face,

Our deeds were neither great nor rare.

Home is where we have to gather grace.

The hardships of the journey had darkened everyone’s face. But they felt that it was not worth the effort. After reaching there, they found out that there was nothing extraordinary. Moreover, many other groups had reached there earlier. So, it was not a rare achievement either. That is why the narrator concluded that they should have stayed at home and tried to gather love and respect of others. Doing good to the mankind makes more sense and it’s a better way than going to a pilgrimage to gather God’s grace.

The poet has been successful in conveying his message through the narrative poem. But, as already told, there is a great deal of investigation on what this ‘home’ may indicate and ‘gather grace’ may mean. And that is the beauty of the poem Enterprise.