

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 5: FATHER TO SON



FATHER TO SON

~Summary~

-by Elizabeth Jennings

Stanza- 1

I do not understand this child
Though we have lived together now
In the same house for years. I know
Nothing of him, so try to build
Up a relationship from how
He was when small.

Explanation: The father unhappily reflects on his inability to understand his own son. They have been staying in the same house for years but, due to non-communication and a lack of understanding, both son and father are not able to understand each other. The father does not know much about his son's interests, likes or dislikes. Thus, he tries to build up the same kind of relationship as he used to have when his son was a little child. The father has now perhaps realised that there is a lack of understanding between his son and himself and he wants to take measures so that their relationship improves.

Stanza- 2

Yet have I killed
The seed I sowed or sown it where
The land is his and none of mine?
We speak like strangers, there's no sign
Of understanding in the air.
This child is built to my design
Yet what he loves I cannot share.

Explanation: The father wonders whether it is he himself who is responsible for the failure of the relationship. The father feels that though the child is his son but perhaps he lives in a world different from him. Both father and son behave like strangers. There is lack of understanding and a communication gap which makes them behave not like father and son but more like strangers. The father says that physically the child resembles him but he does not appreciate what his son likes.

Stanza- 3

Silence surrounds us. I would have
Him prodigal, returning to
His father's house, the home he knew,
Rather than see him make and move
His world. I would forgive him too,
Shaping from sorrow a new love.

Explanation: Silence surrounds their relationship 1 because there is a complete lack of communication between them. The father sees his son as a prodigal (meaning, a child who foolishly runs away from home) and wants him to return to the home he has always known, so that they can rebuild the relationship to have a new start. He does not want the son to start life afresh without the father. He further says that he is willing to forgive his son for running away. Here the father's tone is somewhat condescending, implying that the father is unable to let his son go, despite restricting the son's independence and development.

Stanza- 4

Father and son, we both must live
On the same globe and the same land,
He speaks: I cannot understand
Myself, why anger grows from grief.
We each put out an empty hand,
Longing for something to forgive.

Explanation: Both fathers and their sons all over the world must learn to live together in spite of their misunderstandings and differences. At this point in the poem, the son speaks for the first time and admits that he too feels the sadness of the broken relationship, but he is angry due to his confusion. Both father and son want to forgive each other, but neither is ready to take the first step of asking for forgiveness from the other. However, the situation can improve if they find a way of getting closer to each other.

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NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 86)

(Think it out)

Question 1. Does the poem talk of an exclusively personal experience or is it fairly universal?

Answer: The poem discusses a fairly universal experience concerning the relationship between parents and children. The poem discusses the communication gap and how neither of them understands what the other is thinking.

Question 2. How is the father's helplessness brought out in the poem?

Answer: The father's helplessness is emphasised by the depiction of his emotional struggle. He is aware of the issue and wants to solve it, but he is unable to do so. He bemoans the fact that his son has become a stranger to him. He regrets the lack of a strong emotional bond and proper communication with his estranged son and wishes to start over and rebuild their relationship.

Question 3. Identify the phrases and lines that indicate distance between father and son.

Answer: Lines and phrases that show distance between father and son are:

"land is his and none of mine"

"Him prodigal, returning to his father's house"

"see him make and move his world"

"put out an empty hand"

Question 4. Does the poem have a consistent rhyme scheme?

Answer: The poem has a rhyme scheme, but it is inconsistent. The rhyme scheme varies slightly between stanzas.