

# Fire And Ice

BY **ROBERT FROST**



*Some say the world will end in fire,*

*Some say in ice.*

*From what I've tasted of desire*

*I hold with those who favor fire.*

*But if it had to perish twice,*

*I think I know enough of hate*

*To say that for destruction ice*

*Is also great*

*And would suffice.*

## Introduction

Fire and Ice by Robert Frost is a short, figurative and symbolic poem that compares the scientific assumptions of his time and his own imaginations. The poet talks about the discourse going on about which of the two things i.e. fire and ice will destroy the world.

### **The Central Idea Of the Poem:**

The poem "Fire and Ice" by Robert Frost is about the hypothetical end of the world, with the speaker asserting that it will be destroyed either by fire or by ice. One could argue, though, that the central idea of this poem is that fire and ice are equally destructive, in their own ways. The central idea around which the entire poem revolves is that only love, equality, mutual understanding and sympathy for one and all can help in establishing peace on the Earth. The poet mentions that both fire and ice are probable ends of this world. While he talks about how fire represents desire and can, therefore, be a cause of the end of the world, he also mentions ice in between to symbolize that the coldness and indifference towards one another will also be enough to end the world.

### **Fire and Ice : Poem Meaning**

For the poet, fire means the burning desire for the material things and ice means coldness that emerges in humans because of the desires and materialistic life. He finally concludes that both of these weapons are equally dangerous and will lead the world towards destruction.

This short poem comprises of nine lines and has rhyme scheme aba abc bcb. There are three sentences. In the first sentence, the poet explains the popular debate that is prevailing in the society since long about what will destroy the world.

In the second sentence, he metaphorically changes the discourse. Now fire and ice mean something deeper and profound. In the final line, which is the longest, he gives his own thoughts.

### **Part I**

The poet begins the poem by narrating the popular and age-old debate about the two things out of which one will destroy the world. These two things are fire and ice.

Some scientists believe that it is the fire that will be responsible for the destruction of the world. The fire here means the lave which is in the core of the earth. People believe that someday, the earth will burst and there will be huge explosions of fire that will burn the world and hence everything will be destroyed.

The other belief is that it is the ice that will destroy the world. Now, ice may refer to different things (as I have read different interpretations of this word in various sites). First, ice probably refers to melting of glaciers and rising of sea-level in which everything will sink.

However, this interpretation does not seem to be the exact meaning of what Frost talks about. The other interpretation of ice is the entering of a meteor or any other thing from the space which will stop the sunlight and hence, there will be an ice age which will make the world perish. Whatever the meanings of fire and ice are, the poet gives a popular assumption of his time.

## **Part II**

In the next line, the poet comes to his own interpretation of these two terms. According to him, he has tasted desire and hence he is of the thought that those who favour fire are right and he supports their view.

Desire is what led Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. It is the desire which makes the people greedy, materialistic and deceitful.

It is the desire for power that led the deadliest wars, battles and cost an uncountable loss of humans as well as other living things. Hence, for the poet, the fire of desire will destroy the world.

### **Part III**

But, the poet says that if the world were to destroy twice ice would also have destroyed it. Ice, in the words of Frost, refers to coldness in the relation. With the emergence of materialistic thoughts, emotions and human warmth have vanished away. In the race of worldly things, people have forgotten other humans and have started loving material things. Thus for the poet, the hate which has emerged because of desire would also have destroyed the world if it were had to perish twice.

Note how the poet has brought two different things together. Ice and fire cannot be there at the same time. But for the poet, desire (fire) is what leads to coldness (ice). Hence both will be there to destroy the world in the future.

### **Summary And Analysis of the Poem**

'Fire And Ice' is a short poem by Robert Frost. In this poem, the poet refers to two predictions of how the world will end. He presents two opposite views about the end of humanity and the world. He discusses these two possibilities which will be the reason for the end of the world. One such possibility is the world ending in flames of fire. It is so, because when he ponders over the burning flames of desires of people. These will definitely hurl the world into another nuclear war, and hence it will burn up the entire world in flames. The second possibility for the end of the world is due to the ice.

The poet has a strong feeling that people have so much hatred in their hearts against each other that it will be sufficient to freeze the entire planet towards death. So, the fire due to evil desires and ice of wicked hatred are the two opposite opinions enough to destroy the world.

The poet is very much sure of the destruction of humanity on someday. He is talking about the two different beliefs regarding the end of this world. These are on the basis of the sayings of the people. The poet says that he is in favour of those people who say this world will end in fire. This is because he has seen the effect and result of uncontrolled and unending desires over the life of human beings. He finds that human evil desires are similar to the fire in its nature. So this fire may become a big reason to destroy humankind and this world too.

On the other hand, the second belief in this regard says that ice is also sufficient for destroying this world. Here the poet compares the nature of ice with hatred feelings of humans with the other humans. As ice can make the body numb with its prolonged contact, similarly hatred can also give the numbness to our mind and thoughts. And hence it can make us insensitive and cruel. Such cruelty towards humanity will be more responsible for the destruction of the world compared to the desire.

The speaker brings us all into the middle of the argument between two different categories of the people. One who thinks that the world will come to a fiery end and other people who think the world will freeze resulting to the end. Poet is possibly talking about the literal end of the world. But he is also talking about the power that human beings have to destroy each other.

The poet experiences the romantic desire that he has taught the passion for emotions like love and lust. These will probably have the power to turn the earth into a big fireball. But he has also experienced the other extreme side. This is about colder emotions like hate which have great destructive power. It is a common fact that love gets all the publicity, whereas hate is the silent killer. It may not have the same effect as the fireball ending, but it will do the trick.

## Key points

- ❖ The poem has been written symbolically.
- ❖ The poet says that there are mainly two opinions about the end of this world, one by fire and another by ice.
- ❖ The symbols-‘Fire’ and ‘Ice’ have been used for human emotions like desire and hatred respectively.
- ❖ As fire can spread very fast and cause a great destruction in no time likewise our desires may also prove very destructive if they go out of control.
- ❖ Hatred causes slow destruction like ice but it is also very harmful.

## Analysis of Literary Devices in “Fire and Ice”

Robert Frost has used some literary devices in this poem. The analysis of some of the literary devices used in this poem is given below:

1. **Assonance**: Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line such as the long sound of /o/ in “I hold with those who favor fire”.
2. **Alliteration**: Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line such as the sound of /f/ in “I hold with those who favor fire”.
3. **Imagery**: Imagery is used to make readers perceive things involving their five senses. For example, “Some say the world will end in fire” and “To say that for destruction ice, is also great”.
4. **Symbolism**: Symbolism is a use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings different from their literal meanings. “Fire” is the symbol of desires and “Ice” symbolizes hatred. Similarly, “green” and “gold” are the symbol of beauty and happiness.
5. **Anaphora**: It refers to the repetition of a word or expression in the first part of some verses. For example,

“Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.”

6. **Personification**: Personification is to give human qualities to inanimate objects. In this poem, “Fire” and “Ice” are capable of destruction. Therefore, the poet personifies fire and ice by giving them a mind which is capable of destroying almost anything.
7. **Enjambment**: It is defined as a thought or clause that does not come to an end at a line break; rather, it moves over the next line. For example,

“From what I’ve tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.”

### **Conclusion :**

The poem is revolving around the theme that human emotions are destructive, and has two possible forms.

### **Short questions and answers**

Q1: What are the two opinions discussed in the poem about the end of this world?

A: The two opinions are that this world will end either in fire or in ice.

Q2: What does fire stand for in the poem?

A: Fire stands for desire as it spreads very fast if remains uncontrolled.

Q3: What does ice stand for in the poem?

A: Ice stands for hatred as both are same in nature, they make us insensitive and rigid.

### **Textbook questions & answers**

Q1: There are many ideas about how the world will ‘end’. Do you think the world will end some day? Have you ever thought what would happen if the sun got so hot that it ‘burst’, or grew colder and colder?

A: Yes I believe that this world will end some but when nobody knows.

Whether the sun gets hot or it gets colder in both the situations end of this world is sure.

Q2: For Frost, what do 'fire' and 'ice' stand for? Here are some ideas:

# greed # avarice # cruelty # lust # conflict # fury # intolerance  
# rigidity # insensitivity # coldness # indifference # hatred.

Ans.

FIRE: greed, avarice, lust, conflict, fury, intolerance.

ICE: cruelty, rigidity, insensitivity, coldness, indifference, hatred.

Q3: What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? How does it help in bringing out the contrasting ideas in the poem?

A: The rhyme scheme of the poem is: aba, abc, bcb. The two contrasting ideas fire and ice are totally supported by the rhyme scheme of the poem as different alphabets carry different ideas which are expressed in the poem. The poet has presented two opposite views about the end of the world. The poet discusses the two possibilities regarding the end of the world. One possibility is the world ending in flames of fire. The poet feels so when he ponders over the burning flames of desires of people. These desires for more money, more power, etc. will surely hurl the world into another nuclear war, which will burn up the entire world in flames. The second possibility of the doom of the world is with ice. The poet feels people have so much of hatred in their hearts against one another that it is sufficient to freeze the entire planet to death.

So, the fire of evil desires and ice of wicked hatred are the two contradictory opinions presented in the poem Fire and Ice by Robert Frost.

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