

ACT I Scene 3

CONTEXT QUESTIONS

1. (i) Antonio is bound to a bond according to which if he fails to repay the amount in due time, Shylock will be entitled to take an exact pound of flesh from any part of Antonio's body that he may wish. It was very unwise of Antonio to misjudge Shylock's intentions and sign such a fatal bond.
 - (ii) Can you help me and will you do me this favour?
 - (iii) When Shylock says the above words, he means that Antonio is a reliable man, whose surety is sufficient to give a loan.
 - (iv) Shylock enumerates the possible dangers to Antonio's merchandise — ships being only planks of wood are apt to be broken; the mariners being merely human beings, are liable to be drowned; there are pirates on the waters; and there are all the dangers of the ocean from the gales, tempests and dangerous rocks.

- (v) Antonio can be considered as a prudent businessman as his wealth is distributed over the whole world. One of Antonio's ship is on its journey to Tripolis, another is bound for the Indies, a third is voyaging to Mexico, fourth to England and others to various other distant places. He is so overconfident of his riches that he agrees to an unreasonable and dangerous bond.
2. (i) Publicans were tax collectors for the Romans and were generally oppressive. They were hated by the Jews because they were agents of Rome, who collected taxes also from the Jews. Publican is a natural term of contempt and loathing in the mouth of a Jew. Shylock hates Antonio because he is a Christian, lends money without interest and hurls abuses on him.
- (ii) (a) *low simplicity*: childish foolishness
(b) *gratis*: free of interest.
(c) *rate of usance*: rate of interest.
- (iii) The words mean that if Shylock could get hold of Antonio at a disadvantage or in a weak spot, he will satisfy fully the long-standing hatred he has against him.
- (iv) Shylock had a long-standing grudge against Antonio because Antonio was a Christian and looked upon the holy Jewish race with contempt. He used to lend money without interest and thus, bring down the rate of interest. He even spat on Shylock, kicked him and called him a 'cut-throat dog'.
- (v) 'The Sacred Nation' is a reference to the holy Jewish race. Antonio insults Shylock for his business deals and for earning profit by lending money on interest.
- (vi) Shylock plans to get money immediately from a wealthy fellow-Jew Tubal. It shows that Shylock wants to execute the bond as soon as possible and use the chance to take his revenge on Antonio.
3. (i) The topic referred to in the extract is lending money for interest. Jacob was the second son of Issac who became the third successor to Abraham. Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nation and Jacobs' grandfather.
- (ii) Laban was Jacob's uncle. Jacob and Laban entered into an agreement that Jacob would receive as his wages the lambs which were born with spots or stripes. During the breeding season, Jacob arranged the wooden rods in such a way that the shadows of the rods should fall on the sheep. Consequently, most of the lambs were born spotted or striped, and thus, they became Jacob's property.
- (iii) Taking interest means to charge specific amounts on the money given as loan for a specified period. Receiving payment for one's labour means to take remuneration for one's service rendered. This is legitimate while taking interest is not in order.

- (iv) Esau and Jacob were Issac's sons. Issac wanted to bless his elder son Esau but would do so after he brought him some savoury meat. Jacob's mother Rebecca overheard this conversation. She wanted to get this blessing for Jacob. She told Jacob to fetch two goats to make a savoury dish. Rebecca then asked Jacob to go to his blind father with the savoury meat. In this way, Jacob, through the crafty assistance of his mother, got the blessing of his father.
 - (v) After this extract, Antonio tells Shylock that it was purely a matter of chance in Jacob's case. He had no control over it himself, but providence guided and governed the event. It was not a matter in the hands of men, like the taking of interest.
4. (i) Rialto was the Venetian Stock Exchange where the merchants met for the transaction of business.
- (ii) Shylock speaks of his ill-treatment at the hands of Antonio. He says that Antonio had spat upon his Jewish robe in contempt and called him an unbeliever and a cur. He had also spat upon his beard. On another day he had pushed him aside with his foot as if he were a stray dog being kicked out of his house. Shylock reacted to Antonio's insults patiently.
 - (iii) Shylock bore Antonio's insults patiently since, as a shrewd Jew, he was waiting for an opportune time to take revenge on Antonio. Earlier, in the scene Shylock admits that patience is the badge of his race.
 - (iv) Financially Antonio is a threat to Shylock's money-lending business because he lends money without charging interest and thus brings down the rate of interest charged by money-lenders. Besides, he hates Antonio since he is a Christian, who despises the Jewish race.
 - (v) Antonio needs to borrow money from his enemy Shylock to give it to Bassanio, his friend so that he can go to Belmont to woo the rich lady Portia.
 - (vi) In this scene, Shylock is presented as shrewd, cunning and crafty. However, the most evident trait of his character is that of revenge – to take revenge on Antonio for all the insults heaped on him by Antonio. He is eager to execute the bond-document for this purpose.
5. (i) Shylock is referring to the insults hurled on him by Antonio such as speaking abusively of him and his money-lending, spitting on him, kicking him, calling him a dog and ridiculing the Jews.
- (ii) 'The present wants' refer to the immediate need of Antonio – three thousand ducats to provide for Bassanio's trip to Belmont to woo Portia. The speaker is ready to supply the wants provided Antonio signs a bond, according to which if Antonio is unable to pay him the money on the specified date, the penalty to be paid will be an exact pound of flesh from any part of Antonio's body.

- (iii) Antonio storms Shylock by saying that in future too he is likely to abuse and disgrace him and that he should lend the money as to an enemy rather than a friend. He challenges him to exact the penalty if he fails to repay on time. Shylock is willing to lend the money without interest because he wants to trap Antonio in a fatal bond and take his revenge.
 - (iv) Immediately after this, the speaker proposes to Antonio to accompany him to a lawyer and execute a bond with his signature wherein the forfeit to be paid will be an exact pound of flesh from any part of Antonio's body.
 - (v) 'This is kind I offer you' means this is the kindness that I offer you. This refers to his lending of money without charging any interest on it.
 - (vi) The third person present at the scene is Bassanio. He is reluctant to agree to Shylock's terms because he did not trust the kind words uttered by Shylock. He tells Antonio that he will not have him make such an agreement on his account. He would rather remain as poor as he is now and do without his wants supplied at such a price.
6. (i) A notary is a lawyer who has the authority to execute official and legal dealings and agreements. Shylock wants to take Antonio to the notary to sign the bond document which stipulates that the forfeit to be paid will be a pound of flesh from any part of Antonio's body.
- (ii) (a) *single bond*: agreement in which Antonio will be the only signatory.
 - (b) *merry sport*: for a pleasant joke.
- (iii) Bassanio tells Antonio that he will not have him make such an agreement on his account. He adds that he would rather remain as poor as he is now and do without his wants supplied at such a price.
 - (iv) Antonio is confident that there is no danger in signing the bond because he is confident that one month before the date of payment, his ships will have brought nine times the amount they are borrowing and they will not have to pay the penalty. This incident shows Antonio's overconfidence and generosity towards Bassanio.
 - (v) Shylock insists on a pound of Antonio's flesh to take revenge on him and to put him completely at his mercy. Shylock's hatred for Antonio and Christians is shown in his absurd demand. Taking advantage of the situation, he wants to take revenge on Antonio and all Christians, who persecuted him and his race.