

## 1. SUCCESS IS COUNTED SWEETEST

Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne'er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host  
Who took the flag today  
Can tell the definition,  
So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,  
On whose forbidden ear  
The distant strains of triumph  
Break, agonized and clear.

### Explication of the Poem

This poem gives us a new interpretation for the term 'success.' The poet does not discuss the meaning of the word, 'success', nor does she attempt to trace the origin of the word. She focuses her attention on the question, 'who will understand 'success' better? - the victorious or the defeated person? The poet claims directly or ironically that those who are denied 'victory' actually understand it better than those who experience it. Those who are defeated will certainly understand the value of success better because defeat enlarges their vision and gives them a clear picture of success. In other words, those who never succeed appreciate the true measure of success. Success will be more alluring to such people who miss it often in life. Emily Dickinson conveys this idea literally and metaphorically. To comprehend nectar (not to taste nectar) one must suffer thirst.

She repeats the idea using another figurative expression. To tell the definition of 'victory' one must suffer defeat. Soldiers clad in purple uniform celebrate their victory displaying the seized flag of the defeated side. They may not understand success better than those who were defeated on the battlefield. The defeated and dying soldiers for whom the triumph of the drum is forbidden, feel more poignantly in the agony of death, the meaning of victory. For the defeated soldier 'victory' means life and 'defeat' means death. The theme of the poem is the perception of value won through deprivation and this theme she explains beautifully using the rhetorical device, called metaphor.

### GLOSSARY

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| To comprehend a nectar | - to understand victory or success. The literal meaning of the word 'nectar' is honey or a fruit. |
| Requires sorest need   | - to suffer thirst.                                                                               |
| The purple host        | - soldiers clad in purple uniform.                                                                |
| Took the flag          | - seizing the flag of the defeated army.                                                          |
| Forbidden ear          | - the triumph of the drum is forbidden.                                                           |