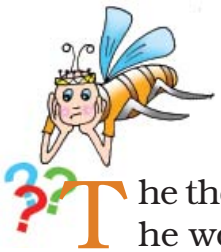
1

Before you read

A king has three questions and he is seeking answers to them. What are the questions? Does the king get what he wants?



Three Questions

I

The thought came to a certain king that he would never fail if he knew three things. These three things were: What is the right time to begin something? Which people should he listen to? What is the most important thing for him to do?

The king, therefore, sent messengers throughout his kingdom, promising a large sum of money to anyone who would answer these three questions.

Many wise men came to the king, but they all answered his questions differently.

In reply to the first question, some said the king must prepare a timetable, and then follow it strictly. Only in this way, they said, could he do everything at its proper time. Others said that it was impossible to decide in advance the right time for doing something. The king should notice all that was going on, avoid foolish pleasures, and

always do whatever seemed necessary at that time. Yet others said that the king needed a council of wise men who would help him act at the proper time. This was because one man would find it impossible to decide correctly, without help from others, the right time for every action.

council: a group of people chosen to give advice or to make rules

But then others said that there were some things which could be urgent. These things could not wait for the decision of the council. In order to decide the right time for doing something, it is necessary to look into the future. And only magicians could do that. The king, therefore, would have to go to magicians.

In their answers to the second question, some said that the people most necessary to the king were his councillors; others said, the priests. A few others chose the doctors. And yet others said that his soldiers were the most necessary.

councillors: members of the council

To the third question, some said science. Others chose fighting, and yet others religious worship.

As the answers to his questions were so different, the king was not satisfied and gave no reward. Instead, he decided to seek the advice of a certain hermit, who was widely known for his wisdom.

hermit: a person who lives alone and leads a simple life

The hermit lived in a wood which he never left. He saw no one but simple people, and so the king put on ordinary clothes. Before he reached the hermit's hut the king left his horse with his bodyguard, and went on alone.

wood/woods: a small forest

As the king came near the hermit's hut, he saw the hermit digging the ground in front of his

hut. He greeted the king and continued digging. The hermit was old and weak, and as he worked, he breathed heavily.

The king went up to the hermit and said, "I have come to you, wise hermit, to ask you to answer three questions: How can I learn to do the right thing at the right time? Who are the people I need most? And what affairs are the most important?"

The hermit listened to the king, but did not speak. He went on digging. "You are tired," said the king. "Let me take the spade and work in your place."

"Thanks," said the hermit, giving the king his spade. Then he sat down on the ground.

affairs: things; matters; business

beds : small patches of ground for plants

When the king had dug two beds, he stopped and repeated his questions. The hermit gave no answer, but stood up, stretching out his hand for the spade, and said, "Now you rest, and let me work."

But the king did not give him the spade and continued to dig.

One hour passed, then another. The sun went down behind the trees, and at last the king stuck the spade into the ground and said, "I came to you, wise man, for an answer to my questions. If you can give me no answer, tell me so and I will return home."

"Here comes someone running," said the hermit.

Comprehension Check

1. *Why did the king want to know answers to three questions?*
2. *Messengers were sent throughout the kingdom*
   - *(i) to fetch wise men.*
   - *(ii) to find answers to the questions.*
   - *(iii) to look for the wise hermit.*
   - *(iv) to announce a reward for those who could answer the questions.*

   Mark your choice.

II

The king turned round and saw a bearded man running towards them. His hands were pressed against his stomach, from which blood was flowing. When he reached the king he fainted and fell to the ground. The king and the hermit

fainted: lost consciousness

removed the man's clothing and found a large wound in his stomach. The king washed and covered it with his handkerchief, but the blood would not stop flowing. The king re-dressed the wound until at last the bleeding stopped.

re-dressed: dressed again

The man felt better and asked for something to drink. The king brought fresh water and gave it to him. By this time the sun had set and the air was cool. The king with the hermit's help carried the wounded man into the hut and laid him on the bed. The man closed his eyes and lay quiet. The king, tired by his walk and the work he had done, lay down on the floor and slept through the night. When he awoke, it was several minutes before he could remember

where he was or who the strange bearded man lying on the bed was.

"Forgive me!" said the bearded man in a weak voice, when he saw that the king was awake.

"I do not know you and have nothing to forgive you for," said the king.

"You do not know me, but 1 know you. 1 am that enemy of yours who swore revenge on you, because you put my brother to death and seized my property. I knew you had gone alone to see that hermit, and I made up my mind to kill you on your way home. But the day passed and you did not return. So I left my hiding-place, and I came upon your bodyguard, who recognised me and wounded me. I escaped from him but I should have died if you had not dressed my wounds. I wished to kill you, and you have saved my life. Now, if I live, I will serve you as your most faithful servant and will order my sons to do the same. Forgive me!"

seized: took by force

faithful: loyal and true

The king was very happy to have made peace with his enemy so easily, and to have won him over as a friend. He not only forgave him but said he would send his servants and his own doctor to look after him, and he promised to give back the man his property.

Leaving the wounded man, the king went out of the hut and looked round for the hermit. Before going away he wished once more to get answers to his questions. The hermit was on his knees sowing seeds in the beds that had been dug the day before. The king went up to the hermit and said, "For the last time I beg you to answer my questions, wise man."

"You have already been answered!" said the hermit still bending down to the ground and looking up at the king as he stood before him.

"How have I been answered? What do you mean?"

"Do you not see?" replied the hermit. "If you had not pitied my weakness yesterday and had not dug these beds for me, you would have gone away. Then that man would have attacked you and you would have wished you had stayed with me. So the most important time was when you were digging the beds. And I was the most important man, and to do me good was your most important business. Afterwards, when the man ran to us, the most important time was when you were caring for him, because if you had not dressed his wounds he would have died without having made peace with you. So he was the most important man, and what you did for him was your most important business.

"Remember then, there is only one time that is important and that time is 'Now'. It is the most important time because it is the only time we have any power to act.

"The most necessary person is the person you are with at a particular moment, for no one knows what will happen in the future and whether we will meet anyone else. The most important business is to do that person good, because we were sent into this world for that purpose alone."

LEO TOLSTOY

[retold]

Comprehension Check

Complete the following sentences by adding the appropriate parts of the sentences given in the box.

1. *Many wise men answered the king's questions,* _____
2. *Someone suggested that there should be a council of wise men* _____
3. *Someone else suggested that the king should have a timetable* _____
4. *The king requested the hermit* _____
5. *The king washed and dressed the bearded man's wound,* _____

- *but the bleeding would not stop.*
- *to answer three questions.*
- *but their answers were so varied that the king was not satisfied.*
- *and follow it strictly.*
- *to help the king act at the right time.*

Working with the Text

Answer the following questions.

1. Why was the king advised to go to magicians?
2. In answer to the second question, whose advice did the people say would be important to the king?
3. What suggestions were made in answer to the third question?
4. Did the wise men win the reward? If not, why not?

5. How did the king and the hermit help the wounded man?
6. (i) Who was the bearded man?
   (ii) Why did he ask for the king's forgiveness?
7. The king forgave the bearded man. What did he do to show his forgiveness?
8. What were the hermit's answers to the three questions? Write each answer separately. Which answer do you like most, and why?

Working with Language

1. Match items in List A with their meanings in List B.

fainted: lost consciousness

	A	B
(i)	wounded	got up from sleep
(ii)	awoke	give back
(iii)	forgive	small patches of ground for plants
(iv)	faithful	severely injured
(v)	pity	pardon
(vi)	beds	loyal
(vii)	return	feel sorry for

Use any three of the above words in sentences of your own. You may change the form of the word.

2. Each of the following sentences has two blanks. Fill in the blanks with appropriate forms of the word given in brackets.

He has _____ to help me. Do you think he will remember his _____? (promise)

He has *promised* to help me. Do you think he will remember his *promise*?

(i) The _____ said that only fresh evidence would make him change his _____.(judge)

(ii) I didn't notice any serious _____ of opinion among the debaters, although they _____ from one another over small points. (differ)

(iii) It's a fairly simple question to_____,but will you accept my _____ as final? (answer)

(iv) It isn't _____ that _____ should always be the mother of invention. (necessary)

(v) Hermits are _____ men. How they acquire their _____ no one can tell. (wise)

(vi) The committee has _____ to make Jagdish captain of the team. The _____ is likely to please everyone. (decide)

(vii) Asking for _____ is as noble as willingness to _____. (forgive)

Speaking and Writing

1. Imagine you are the king. Narrate the incident of your meeting the hermit. Begin like this:

   The wise men answered my questions, but I was not satisfied with their answers. One day I decided to go and meet the hermit...

2. Imagine you are the hermit. Write briefly the incident of your meeting the king. Begin like this:

   One day I was digging in my garden. A man in ordinary clothes came to see me. I knew it was the king...

Do you know...

Does an ostrich really stick its head in the sand to hide from an enemy?

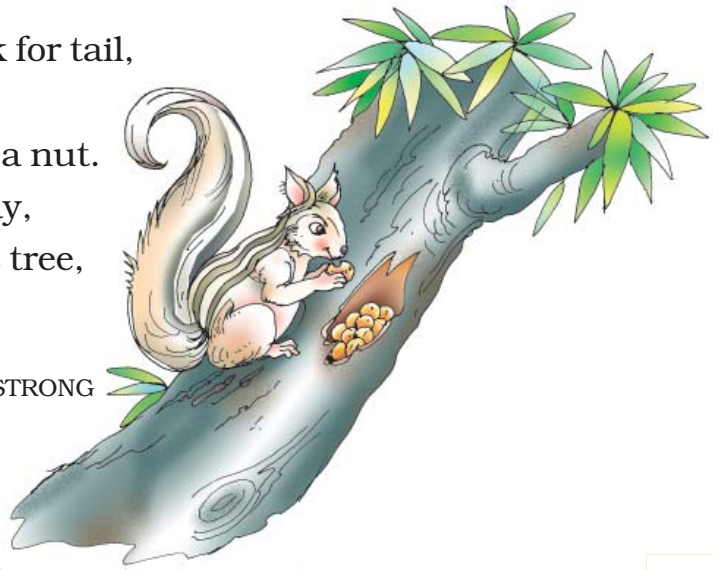
Answer on page 32

The Squirrel

You may have seen a squirrel sitting on the ground eating a nut. What did it look like? Here is a poet's description of just such a squirrel.

He wore a question mark for tail,
An overcoat of gray,
He sat up straight to eat a nut.
He liked to tease and play,
And if we ran around his tree,
He went the other way.

MILDRED BOWERS ARMSTRONG



Working with the Poem

1. Why does the poet say the squirrel "wore a question mark for tail"? Draw a squirrel, or find a picture of a squirrel sitting on the ground. How would you describe its tail?
2. Do we usually say that an animal 'wears' a tail? What do we say? (*Think*: Does an animal wear a coat? Consult a dictionary if you like, and find out how 'wear' is used in different ways.)
3. "He liked to tease and play". Who is teasing whom? How ?

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Honeycomb

Unit 1: Three Questions

1. How did all the wise men answer to the king's questions?
Ans: The wise men answered the king's questions differently.

2. Why did the king want to know the answers to the three questions?
Ans: The king wanted to know the answers to the three questions because he thought that he would never fail if he knew them.

3. Why didn't the king give any reward?
Ans: The king didn't give any reward because he was not satisfied with the answers he got.

4. Why did the bearded man want to take revenge on the king?
Ans: The king had put the man's brother to death and had also seized his property. That is why he wanted to take revenge on the king.

5. Who gave the answers of the three questions to the king?
Ans: The hermit gave the answers of the three questions to the king.

6. What is the most important time in one's life?
Ans: The most important time in one's life is the present moment.

7. Who is the most necessary person in one's life?
Ans: The most necessary person in one's life is the person he/she is with at a particular moment for no one knows what will happen in the future and whether he/she will meet anyone else.

8. What is the most important thing to do in one's life?
Ans: The most important thing to do in one's life is to do good to the person he/she is with at the present moment.

9. How did the king and the hermit help the wounded man?
Ans: The king and the hermit removed the man's clothing and found a large wound in his stomach. The king washed and covered it with his handkerchief but the blood would not stop flowing. The king redressed the wound until at last the blood stopped. The king with the hermit's help carried the wounded man into the hut and laid him on the bed. In this way, the king and the hermit helped him.

10. What did the king do to show his forgiveness?
Ans: The king showed his forgiveness by telling him that he would send servants and doctor to look after him. He also promised to give back the man his property.