



## THREE QUESTIONS



### BEFOREHAND

The story is about an Emperor who wants to know the answer of three questions so as to get enlightenment. In order to run his empire in a proper way, he wanted to know the answers from a rational man. The ascetic tells the Emperor that all the answers are within himself. Read the story to know how did the Emperor gets to know the answer to his questions. Were the answers to his questions learned or an act of self-realization.

### I

The thought struck to a certain Emperor that he would never go down if he knew three concepts. His three queries were: What is the best time to start something? Which people should he consult? What is the most necessary work for him to do?

The Emperor, thereafter, sent agents all over his empire, assuring a handsome amount to anyone who would explain these three queries.

Many **enlightened** men came to the Emperor, they all gave different explanations for the queries.

To answer the first query, some advised the Emperor to make a schedule, and then follow it **firmly**. Only in this manner, they said, he could do everything at its appropriate time. Few objected, that it was **absurd** to schedule in beforehand the best time for doing something. The Emperor should observe all the happenings, avoid silly comforts, and always do whatever seemed important at that moment. Few others said that the Emperor needed a council of ministers who would guide him in his actions at the proper time. Because it was impossible for one man to act correctly, without getting guidance from others, the proper time for each action.

But then few said that there were some matters which could be critical. These matters could not be delayed for the judgement of the council. In order to determine the best time for executing something, it is important to know in advance. And only fortunetellers could do that. The Emperor, therefore, would have to consult them.

To answer the second query, some advised that the people mandatory to the Emperor were his ministers; while other suggested, the holy man. A few others suggested the surgeon, when some said that his army were the most important.

**enlightened** : someone with greater knowledge  
**absurd** : wildly unreasonable

**firmly** : strongly and tightly



To answer the third query, some advised education. Few chose military skill and yet some chose devotional worship.

As the answers to his queries were varied, the Emperor was not convinced and no award was given. Rather, he determined to get the opinion of an **ascetic**, who was well known for his intelligence.

The ascetic lived in a forest from which he never came out. He meets no one other than ordinary people, and so the Emperor wore simple clothes. Before reaching the ascetic's shack, the Emperor left his horse with his guards and went on unaccompanied.

As the Emperor reaches the ascetic's shack, he saw him digging the land in front of his shack. He addressed the Emperor and go on digging. The ascetic was aged and feeble, and as he dug out the land, he heaved heavily.

[The Emperor approached him and said, "I have visited you, <sup>logical</sup> **rational** ascetic, to get answer to three queries: How can I know the best time to do the right work? Who are the most important people? And which matters are essential?"

The ascetic attentively heard the Emperor, but did not react and continued digging. The Emperor said, "You are tired, give me the spade and allow me to replace you in the work."

The ascetic thanked him, while handing his spade to the emperor and then rested on the ground.

When the Emperor had dug two rows, he paused and again asked his queries. The ascetic gave no reply, but stood up, pointing out his hand for the spade and said, "Now you take rest, and let me dig the ground."

But the Emperor did not handed him the spade and go on digging by himself.

An hour passed, then two. The Sun set behind the trees and finally the Emperor grounded the spade and said, "I came here, enlightened man, to get answers to my queries. If you can't give me any answer, let me know and I will go back home."

"Someone is approaching towards us running," said the ascetic.

## II

The Emperor looked behind and a man with beard coming towards them. His hands were pushed against his abdomen, from which blood was coming. On reaching the Emperor he lost consciousness and flatten to the ground. The Emperor and the ascetic took out the man's clothes and saw a deep cut in his abdomen. The Emperor cleaned and wrapped the cut with his scarf, but the blood didn't stop coming out. The Emperor again wrapped the cut till the bleeding didn't stopped completely.

The man felt finer and asked something to drink. The Emperor brought fresh water and gave it to him. Meanwhile, the Sun disappeared and breeze was soothing. The Emperor with the

**ascetic** : someone who avoids physical pleasures and live a simple life  
**rational** : who do things based on logic

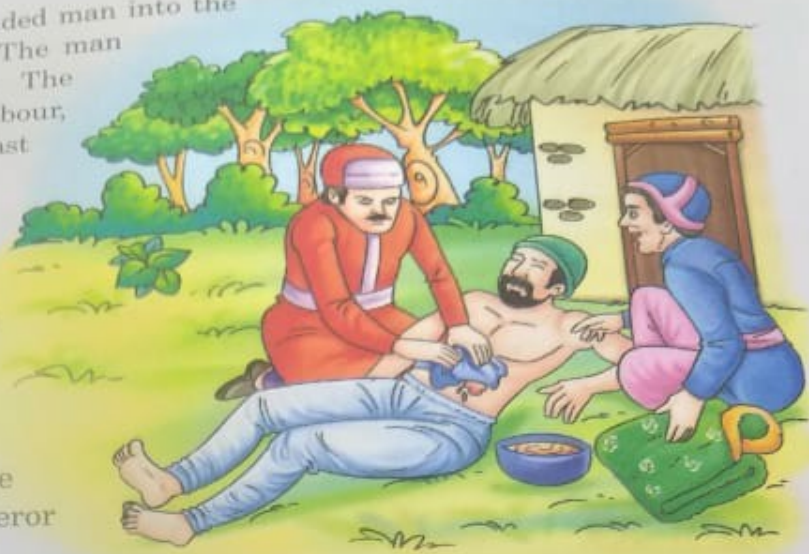
**shack** : a small hut



ascetic's support carried the wounded man into the hut and rested him on the bed. The man closed his eyes and lay quietly. The Emperor, drained by his walk and labour, sat down on the floor and was fast asleep there all night. When he rose, it took a few minutes to recall the place and the strange man with beard resting on the bed.

"Please forgive me!" said the man with beard in a faint whisper, when he found that the Emperor was awakened.

"You are a stranger for me and have nothing to forgive you for," the Emperor said.



"You are unaware about me, but I know you. I am your rival who sworn **vegeance** on you, because you killed my brother and annexed my estate. I was informed that you had gone unattended to meet that ascetic, and I decided to kill you on your way back home. But the day passed and you did not went back. So I came out of my hiding place, and came across one of your attendants. Who identified me and injured me. I escaped from him but wouldn't be alive if you had not wrapped my cuts. I intended to kill you but you saved my life. Now, if I stay alive, I vow to serve you as your most loyal slave and will bid my sons to do the same. Forgive me!"

The Emperor was overjoyed to have reconciled with his rival so easily, and made him his friend. He not only pardoned him but also promised to send his servants and his own physician to take care of him, and also assured to return the man his estate.

Leaving the injured man, the Emperor came out of the hut and searched for the ascetic. Before returning back he wanted to try one more time to get answers to his queries. The ascetic sitting on his knees was implanting the seeds in the rows that were dug the previous day. The Emperor walked towards the ascetic and said, "For the last time I request you to answer my queries rational man."

"You have already been answered!" replied the ascetic while bowing to the ground and glancing at the Emperor standing in front of him.

"How have I been answered? What are you trying to say?"

"Didn't you see?" replied the ascetic. "If you hadn't sympathized over my **fragility** the day before and hadn't dug these rows for me, you would have returned back. Then that man would

**vegeance** : the punishing of someone for harming you or your family

**fragility** : weakness

have invaded you and you would have regretted for not staying with me. Therefore, the best time was when you were digging the rows. And I was the most important man, and to help me was the most important work. Later, when the man came running to us, the best time was when you were taking care of him, because if you had not covered his cuts he would have died without reconciling with you. So he was the most important person, and your doings for him was the most important work.

"Always remember, there is only one time which is important and that time is 'Now'. It is the best time because it is the moment we possess power to act."

"The most important person is the one you are dealing with at a specific moment, because no one is aware what will happen the next moment and if we are going to meet anyone then. The most necessary work is to do good with that person, because we are here in this world for that pursuit only."



**A. Choose the correct option.**

1. A certain Emperor thought of \_\_\_\_\_ questions.  
a. two      b. five      c. three      d. ten
2. The people who came to the palace were giving \_\_\_\_\_ answers.  
a. same      b. different      c. new      d. strange
3. The Emperor decided to visit a \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. priest      b. scientist      c. teacher      d. ascetic
4. The Emperor used his own \_\_\_\_\_ to bandage the wound of the injured man.  
a. shirt      b. blanket      c. scarf      d. hanky
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ had vowed to take revenge from the emperor.  
a. soldier      b. ascetic      c. farmer      d. man

**B. Fill in the blanks.**

1. The Emperor sent agents all over his empire.
2. The Emperor was not pleased with any of the answer and no award was given.
3. The ascetic lived in a forest from which he never came out.
4. Finally the Sun began to set behind the trees.
5. The Emperor found the ascetic implanting the seeds in the rows that were dug the previous day.



**Write True or False.**

- 1. The people coming to the emperor were giving him same answers. False
- 2. The Emperor himself went to visit the ascetic. True
- 3. The ascetic was the bitter enemy of the Emperor. False
- 4. The man came to the ascetic was known by the Emperor. False
- 5. The most important time is now. True

**D. Answer the following questions. (see worksheet for answers)**

- 1. What was the first question and what were its replies by the people who came to the Emperor?
- 2. Why did the Emperor distribute no reward?
- 3. What was the unique thing the Emperor knew about the ascetic?
- 4. Who was the wounded man? Why did he want to take revenge from the Emperor?
- 5. When were the answers of the questions given by the ascetic? Why did he not answer the day before?

**E. What are some of the themes in story "Three Questions"?**

The basic theme of the story is to realize that the only time you have is now. Once that is gone, no power can bring it back.

**WORD TRACK**

**F. Use the following words in your own sentences. (Do it yourself).**

- 1. Schedule : \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Devotional : \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Attentively : \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Disappear : \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Reconcile : \_\_\_\_\_

**G. Give one word for the following from the story.**

- 1. An area or a region where an Emperor rules. Empire
- 2. A group of persons who think and decide a matter. Council
- 3. A person who has left all worldly pleasures and lives alone. Ascetic
- 4. A condition when someone has lost his senses. Fragility

### H. Who said to whom?

1. "I have visited you rational ascetic to get answer of three queries."

Emperor said this to the ascetic.

2. "You are tired, give me the spade and allow me to replace you in the work."

Emperor said this to the ascetic.

3. "Someone is approaching towards us running."

Ascetic said this to the emperor.

4. "Please forgive me!"

The man said this to the emperor.

5. "You are a stranger for me and have nothing to forgive you for."

Emperor said this to the man.

6. "You have already been answered!"

Ascetic said this to the emperor.