

9

THREE QUESTIONS*Notes*

"Three Questions" is a short story by Leo Tolstoy, about a King who feels it's necessary to know the answers of three questions that arose in his mind. Also, he feels he can rule his people well via knowing the answers. He posed those questions to his ministers but could not find any satisfactory answers. Finally, the King decided to visit a well-known hermit in disguise to know the answers for his questions. Will the king get his answers?

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After completing this lesson, the learner:

- Recognises the underlying messages of a literary text;
- Analyses the genre of short story as a literary text by close reading, and interpreting possible meanings;
- Constructs conclusions through discussion and critical thinking;
- Recommends the habit of depending on the present rather than groping over the past or unnecessary hankering after the future.

9.1 SECTION I

It once occurred to a certain king, that if he always knew the right time to begin everything; if he knew who were the right people to listen to, and whom to avoid, and, above all, if he always knew what was the most important thing to do, he would never fail in anything he might undertake.

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And this thought having occurred to him, he had it **proclaimed** throughout his kingdom that he would give a great reward to anyone who would tell him what was the right time for every action, and who were the most necessary people, and how he might know what was the most important thing to do.

*Notes*

- **Proclaimed:**
announced

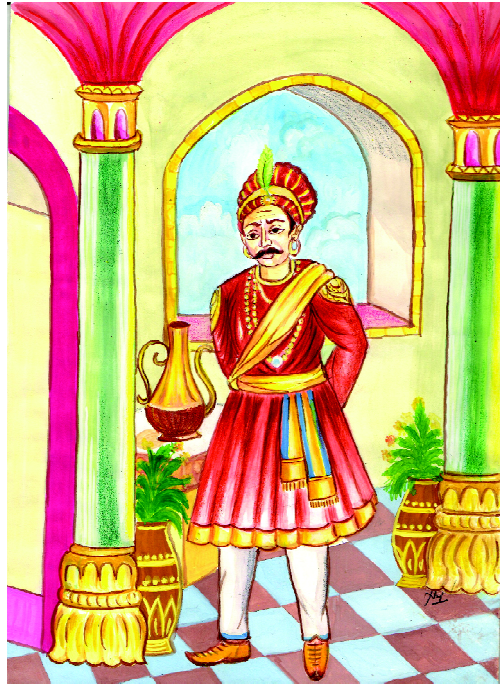


Fig. : 9.1

LET US UNDERSTAND 9.1

Once a King had three questions in his mind and also he believed if he knew the answers of these questions he cannot be conquered by anyone in the world. Those three questions were what is the right time to begin something, whom he should listen to and what is the most important work. Also, he announced a reward for anyone who would give a satisfactory answer.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.1

1. What did occur in the mind of the king?
2. Why did he want to know the answers?
3. What was the first question?

4. What was the second question?
5. What was the third question?

9.2 SECTION II

Many learned men came to the King, but they all answered his questions differently.

In reply to the first question, some said that to know the right time for every action, one must draw up in advance, a table of days, months and years, and must live strictly according to it. Only thus, said they, could everything be done at its proper time. Others declared that it was impossible to decide beforehand the right time for every action; but that, not letting oneself be absorbed in idle pastimes, one should always attend to all that was going on, and then do what was most needful. Others, again, said that however attentive the King might be to what was going on, it was impossible for one man to decide correctly the right time for every action, but that he should have a Council of Wise Men, who would help him to fix the proper time for everything.

But then again others said there were some things which could not wait to be laid before a Council, but about which one had at once to decide whether to undertake them or not. But in order to decide that, one must know beforehand what was going to happen. It is only magicians who know that; and, therefore, in order to know the right time for every action, one must consult magicians.

Equally various were the answers to the second question. Some said, the people the King most needed were his councilors; others, the priests; others, the doctors; while some said the warriors were the most necessary.

To the third question, as to what was the most important occupation: some replied that the most important thing in the world was science. Others said it was skill in warfare; and others, again, that it was religious worship. All the answers being different, the King agreed with none of them, and gave the reward to none. But still wishing to find the right answers to his questions, he decided to consult a **hermit**, widely renowned for his wisdom.

LET US UNDERSTAND 9.2

To the questions of the king, he received various answers which didn't satisfy the king. For the first question they said, some said to prepare a time table or go to magician and so on. For the second also similar answers were given to the king i.e. to have a council of ministers, doctors and so on. For the final question the answers were science,



Notes

- **Hermit:** a person living in solitude as a religious discipline

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religious practices etc. The king didn't find any answer satisfactory. Finally, the king decided to go to a wise hermit in the kingdom.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.2

1. What were the answers the king got for the first question?
2. What were the answers the king got for the second question?
3. What were the answers the king got for the Third question?
4. Was the king happy and satisfied with the answers?
5. What did he finally decide to do?



Notes

- **Dismounted** : get off
- **Frail**: weak

9.3 SECTION III

The hermit lived in a wood which he never quitted, and he received none but common folk. So the King put on simple clothes, and before reaching the hermit's cell **dismounted** from his horse, and, leaving his bodyguard behind, went on alone. When the King approached, the hermit was digging the ground in front of his hut. Seeing the King, he greeted him and went on digging. The hermit was **frail** and weak, and each time he stuck his spade into the ground and turned a little earth, he breathed heavily.



Fig. : 9.2

The King went up to him 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 most need, and to whom should I, therefore, pay more attention than to the rest? And, what affairs are the most important and need my first attention?"

The hermit listened to the King, but answered nothing. He just spat on his hand and **recommended** digging. "You are tired," said the King, "let me take the spade and work awhile for you."

"Thanks!" said the hermit, and, giving the spade to the King, he sat down on the ground.

When he had dug two beds, the King stopped and repeated his questions. The hermit again gave no answer, but rose, stretched out his hand for the spade, and said, "Now rest awhile-and let me work a bit." But the King did not give him the spade, and continued to dig. One hour passed, and another. The sun began to sink behind the trees, and the King at last 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 none, tell me so, and I will return home."



Fig 9.3

"Here comes someone running," said the hermit, "let us see who it is."



Notes

- **Recommended:**
begin again

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Notes

- **Crouched:** squatted down

LET US UNDERSTAND 9.3

The hermit lived in the woods all alone and received and spoke to common people. So the king disguised himself as a common man and went to the hermit. When the king arrived he greeted the hermit. The hermit also took a minute and greeted the king and continued digging the land which he was doing even before the arrival of the king. The king raised his questions to the hermit and said that he had come just to know the answers for those questions. There was no reply from the hermit, he just continued digging. After sometime the king extended a helping hand to dig the soil bed and helped the hermit. After sometime he again raised his three questions and the hermit asked the king to give him the spade and take rest but the king denied and continued digging.


INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.3

1. Why did the king disguise himself?
2. What was the hermit doing?
3. What did the king do when he went there?
4. How did the hermit react?
5. What did the king offer to the hermit?

9.4 SECTION IV

The King turned round, and saw a bearded man come running out of the wood. The man held his hands pressed against his stomach, and blood was flowing from under them. When he reached the King, he fell fainting on the ground moaning feebly. The King and the hermit unfastened the man's clothing. There was a large wound in his stomach. The King washed it as best he could, and bandaged it with his handkerchief and with a towel the hermit had. Again and again the King washed and rebandaged the wound. At last the man revived and asked for something to drink. The King brought fresh water and gave it to him. Meanwhile the sun had set, and it had become cool. So the King, with the hermit's help, carried the wounded man into the hut and laid him on the bed. Lying on the bed the man closed his eyes and was quiet; but the King was so tired with his walk and with the work he had done, that he **crouched** down on the threshold, and also fell asleep--so soundly that he slept all through the short summer

night. When he awoke in the morning, it was long before he could remember where he was, or who was the strange bearded man lying on the bed and gazing **intently** at him with shining eyes.

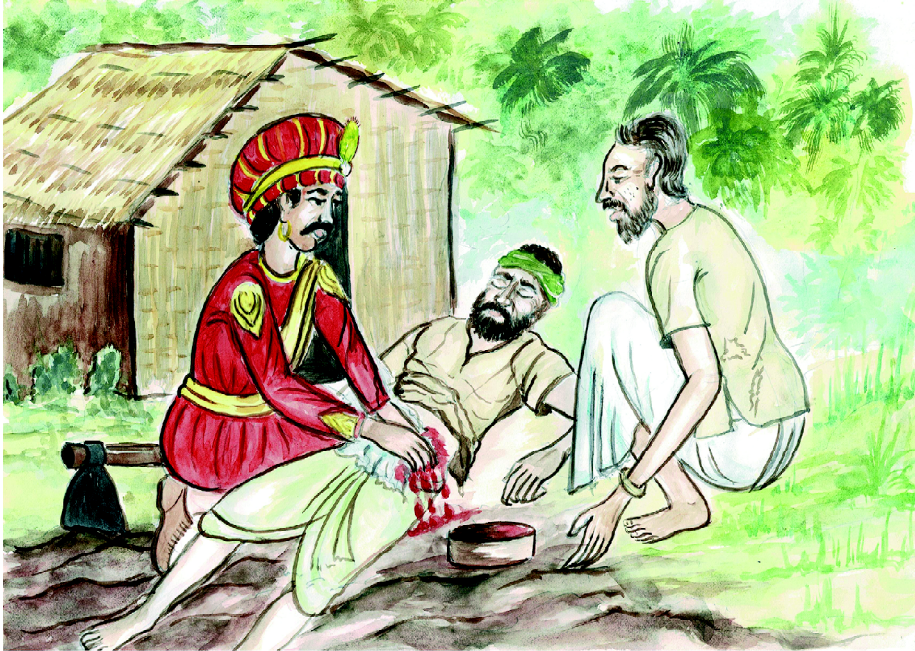


Fig. : 9.4

"Forgive me!" said the bearded man in a weak voice, when he saw that the King was awake and was looking at him. "I do not know you, and have nothing to forgive you for," said the King.

"You do not know me, but I know you. I am that enemy of yours who swore to revenge himself on you, because you executed his brother and seized his property. I knew you had gone alone to see the hermit, and I resolved to kill you on your way back. But the day passed and you did not return. So I came out from my **ambush** to find you, and I came upon your bodyguard, and they recognized me, and wounded me. I escaped from them, but should have bled to death had you not dressed my wound. I wished to kill you, and you have saved my life. Now, if I live, and if you wish it, I will serve you as your most faithful slave, and will bid my sons do the same. Forgive me!

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Notes

- **Intently:** with eager attention
- **Ambush:** a place to hide before a surprise attack

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Fig. : 9.5

"The King was very glad to have made peace with his enemy so easily, and to have gained him for a friend, and he not only forgave him, but said he would send his servants and his own physician to attend him, and promised to restore his property.

LET US UNDERSTAND 9.4

Later they saw a bearded man running towards them and after coming near he fainted. The hermit and the king found him wounded and bleeding. They both did first aid and covered the wound and made him sleep inside the house. Early in the morning when he woke, he asked the king to forgive him and said that he was his enemy and he was waiting to kill the king and meanwhile was identified by the King's man and was attacked. Also, he thanked the king for saving his life and also said he will be his slave and the following generation will do the same. The king was very happy making peace with his enemy and also promised to return the property to him.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.4

1. Who was the bearded man?
2. What did the king and hermit do to him?

3. Why did the king fall asleep on the threshold?
4. Why did the bearded man thank the king and also what did he say?
5. What was the outcome of this encounter in the woods?

9.5 SECTION V

Having taken leave of the wounded man, the King went out into the **porch** and looked around for the hermit. Before going away he wished once more to beg an answer to the questions he had put. The hermit was outside, on his knees, sowing seeds in the beds that had been dug the day before.

The King approached him, and said, "For the last time, I pray you to answer my questions, wise man." "You have already been answered!" said the hermit still crouching on his thin legs, and looking up at the King, who stood before him.

"How answered? What do you mean?" asked the King.

"Do you not see," replied the hermit. "If you had not pitied my weakness yesterday, and had not dug these beds for me, but had gone your way, that man would have attacked you, and you would have repented of not having 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 that man ran to us, the most important time was when you were attending to him, for if you had not bound up 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 is now! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we have any power.

The most necessary man is he with whom you are, for no man knows whether he will ever have dealings with any one else.

And the most important thing to do is, to do good, because for that purpose alone was man sent into this life!"

LET US UNDERSTAND 9.5

After all these conversations, the king thought it was time to leave. Also he thought he would repeat the question once again to the hermit. When he went out he saw the hermit was sowing seeds. He asked his questions again. The hermit said you got the



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- **Porch:** front of the entrance of a building

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answers already. The king asked for an explanation. The hermit said yesterday if the king hadn't helped him the previous day, he would have gone and been killed by the enemy. Instead he stopped to help and same with the enemy he had helped to save his life and in turn he made friendship with his enemy. So the important time is the present time, the important person is who is with at the present moment and the right thing is to do good for that person.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.5**

1. When the king asked for the answer, what was the hermit's reply?
2. What was his answer to the first question?
3. What was his answer for the second question?
4. What was his answer for the third question?
5. Was the king satisfied with the hermit's answers?

CHARACTER SKETCHES**The King**

The King is portrayed as someone who values wisdom and guidance from others. He seeks advice from various learned men and ultimately decides to consult a renowned hermit for the answers he seeks. When he encounters the wounded man and gets to know his identity, he not only tends to the man's wounds but also offers to restore his property and make amends. It showcases the king's compassion, mercy, and capacity for forgiveness, and also highlights the king's humane and noble qualities. He evolves from a seeker of external wisdom to a more enlightened and compassionate individual who understands the true essence of life and leadership.

The Hermit

The hermit in this story is a wise, humble character who imparts valuable life lessons to the King. He lives a simple life, emphasising the importance of the present moment and doing good. His selflessness and compassion shine through when he tends to a wounded man and promotes forgiveness and reconciliation. The hermit's character symbolises wisdom, simplicity, and a deep understanding of human nature.

The bearded man

The bearded man in the story initially appears as an enemy of the King, driven by a desire for revenge due to the execution of his brother and the seizure of his property by the King. However, his encounter with the King after being wounded led to a profound change of heart. Instead of carrying out his revengeful intentions, he expressed remorse, gratitude, and a willingness to become the King's faithful servant. His change of heart highlights the potential for redemption and the capacity for forgiveness and reconciliation when individuals prioritize kindness and compassion over vengeance and hatred.

**DO YOU KNOW**

- This short story is originally written in Russian.
- It was first published in Tolstoy's short story anthology *What Men Live By, and Other Tales* in 1903.
- This English Translation is done by the Maudes.
- This short story is categorised as a parable, a succinct, didactic story, in prose or verse, that illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles.
- Whereas fables employ animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature as characters, parables have human characters.
- Leo Tolstoy's original name is Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy.

LET'S DO

Write a dramatic version of this story and attempt a role play with your friends.

LET'S LEARN**GRAMMAR****Formation of Interrogative Sentences**

Interrogative sentences are used to ask questions. The basic structure often involves inverting the subject and auxiliary or helping verb. Understanding the structure of interrogative sentences helps in forming clear and grammatically correct questions in various contexts.

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- I. Formation of Yes/No Questions:** Yes-no questions are a type of interrogative sentence that can be answered with "yes" or "no." These questions are designed to elicit a positive or negative response from the person being addressed. The basic structure of yes-no questions involves inverting the subject and auxiliary (helping) verb:

[Auxiliary Verb + Subject + Main Verb + Rest of the Sentence?]

Use "am," "is," "are," "was," "were," "do," "does," "did," "have," "has," or "had" as auxiliary verbs depending on the tense of the main verb. It is to note down that the main verb follows the subject.

Examples:

1. Are you coming to the party?
2. Did she finish her homework?
3. Have they visited this museum before?

- II. Formation of Wh-Questions:** Wh-questions are a type of interrogative sentence that begin with a word starting with "wh" (what, where, when, why, who, whom, which, whose, how). These questions typically seek information and cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." The structure is similar to yes/no questions, but with the addition of the Wh-word at the beginning:

[Wh-Word + Auxiliary Verb + Subject + Main Verb + Rest of the Sentence?]

Examples:

1. What are you doing?
2. Where did they go last weekend?
3. Why has she been so busy?

- III. Formation of Questions with Modal Verbs:** Modal verbs express possibility, necessity, permission, ability, or other similar qualities. Questions with modal verbs involve using auxiliary verbs such as "can," "could," "may," "might," "will," "would," "shall," "should," "must," or "ought to" in the formation of interrogative sentences. It helps to form questions that inquire about ability, permission, or willingness. The responses typically address whether the action is possible,

permissible, or agreed upon. The basic structure of questions with modal verbs follows the pattern of placing the modal verb before the subject:

[Modal Verb + Subject + Main Verb + Rest of the Sentence?]

Example:

1. Can you swim?
2. Shall we leave?

IV. Formation of Negative Questions: Negative questions are interrogative sentences that include a negation, typically formed by adding the word "not" or its contraction to the auxiliary (helping) verb. These questions seek a negative response or confirmation that the action or situation described in the question did not occur. The basic formation would be as per the following:

[Auxiliary Verb + Subject + Not + Main Verb + Rest of the Sentence?]

Example:

1. Didn't they enjoy the movie?
2. Aren't you pet friendly?

The responses provide a negative confirmation or correction to the implied negative assertion in the question.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.6

1. Fill in the blanks with proper words to get the answer.

i. _____ you coming to the party?

Answer: No

ii. _____ she finished her homework yet?

Answer: No, she hasn't finished it.

iii. _____ they visited this museum before?

Answer: Yes

iv. _____ I borrow your pen?



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Answer: Yes, you may borrow my pen.

- v. _____ she help us?

Answer: Yes, she could help us.

2. Fill in the blanks with proper words to get an answer.

- i. _____ are you doing?

- ii. _____ did they go last weekend?

- iii. _____ has she been so busy?

- iv. _____ one of them won the tennis match, Becker or Sampras?

- v. _____ will you come to my house?

- vi. _____ can we foster creativity and innovation in educational settings?

3. Now make questions, using Which, Where, What and Who, which will fit the underlined words in the following answers.

- i. I have been to the zoo.

- ii. Amit and Amar are sitting under the Peepal tree.

- iii. My name is Mohinder.

- iv. I like this book better than that one.

- v. Sulekha ate the cake.

- vi. I will give you the brown shirt.

4. Fill in the question words in this dialogue.

Ravi : This shirt is very smart. _____ did you buy it?

Alok : In a shop on Mall Road.

Ravi : _____ shop was it-Modern Store, or Jagannaths?

Alok : Modern Store. But there is another shop on M.G. Road which is just as good.

Ravi : _____ is its name? M.G. is very long _____ exactly is it?

Alok : _____ you know the Tourist Hotel? It is next door, and it is called Uttam Singh Duggal and Sons.

VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT



INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.7

1. Fill in the blanks by using the opposite (antonym) of the words underlined in each sentence.

Example: The hall was _____ but the stage was empty.

The hall was full but the stage was empty.

- i. The dancer was tall and slim but her grandmother was short and _____.
 - ii. Words can _____ but words can also soothe.
 - iii. The candidates forgot to bring their pens but they _____ to bring their identity cards.
 - iv. The cricketers came to the field early but their umpire was _____.
 - v. There was nothing in the house: _____ had been taken away by the thieves.
2. In the following list, there are words and their antonyms in a jumbled order. Find the pairs and write them in a table format:

persuade, work, brief, dissuade, inhuman, failure, play, human, agree, extended, disagree, success, social, bright, praise, dark, criticize, soften, antisocial, harden

3. Use words from above to fill in the blanks. Make necessary changes in the form of the words to make your sentences grammatically correct:
- i. Even hardened criminals can be _____ by praise; _____ only hardens them further.
 - ii. The meeting began on a bright and happy note. Unfortunately, as the _____ increased, the mood became _____ and angry.
 - iii. Don't be sad because you have failed. _____ is the stepping stone to _____.
 - iv. Sometimes humans behave in an _____ way. They forget all rules of

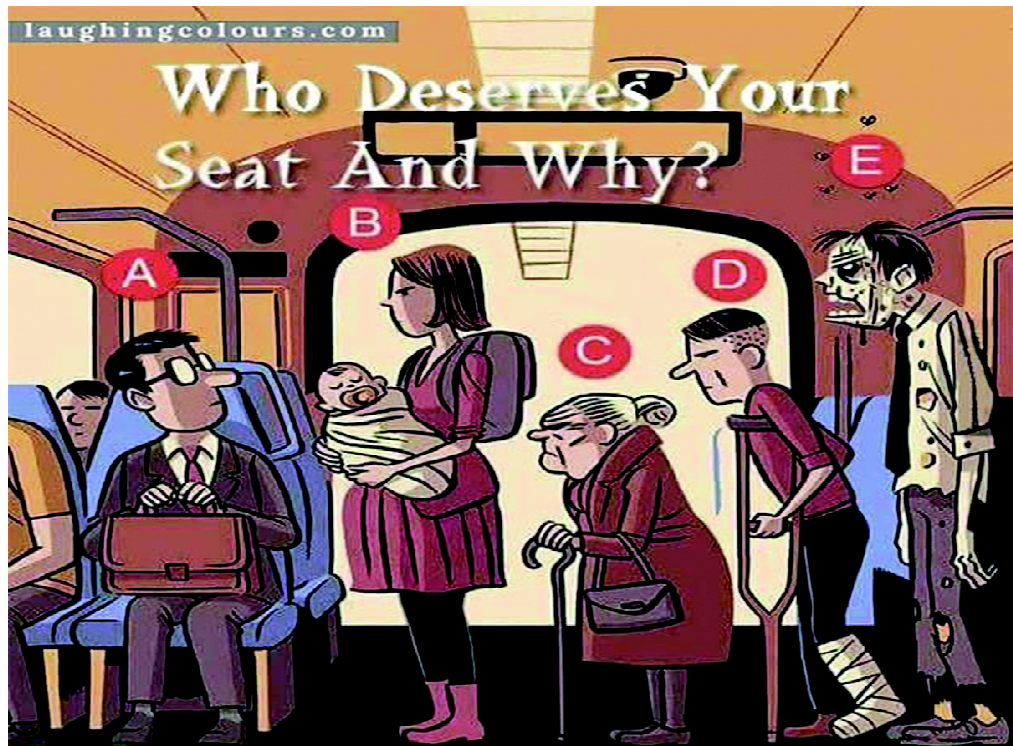


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social behaviour and use _____ ways.

LET'S WRITE

Think and get into a conclusion to write a paragraph within 100 words about the picture.

LET'S TALK

1. Do you think the king will be successful once he gets to know the answers?
2. Do you have any other answers which would be perfectly suitable to the questions of the king?



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

- Focus should be on the tasks at hand rather than dwelling on the past or worrying excessively about the future.
- The importance of being present for others in times of need.
- The significance of being compassionate and helpful to others, and practicing forgiveness and kindness in everyday actions.

- Reflects the idea that people can change; deeply ingrained enmity can be overcome when faced with unexpected acts of kindness and compassion.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Why did the King decide to consult the hermit?
2. Who interrupted the King and the hermit's conversation, and why?
3. Where did the King and the wounded man spend the night?
4. What was the initial intent of the wounded man towards the King?
5. What promise did the King make to the wounded man?
6. What lesson did the hermit teach the King in the end?
7. What is the central theme or moral of the story?



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

9.1

1. It occurred to the king that if he knew the answers for certain questions he would be successful in everything and no one can defeat him.
2. He wanted to become undefeatable so he wanted to know the answers.
3. The first question was what is the right time to begin something.
4. The second question was whom he should listen to.
5. The third question was what is the important work to do.

9.2

1. The answers were that a time table should be formed and strictly followed, time should not be wasted in foolish pleasure, and should have a council of ministers and magicians with him as they could predict the future.
2. To question number two, the answers were councillors; the priests; the doctors; while some said the warriors were the most necessary people.



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3. The answers for third questions were Science; others said it was skill in warfare; and some others again, that it was religious worship.
4. The king was neither happy nor satisfied with the answers.
5. He decided to go to a wise hermit to seek answers.

9.3

1. The king disguised himself as a common man because the hermit met only common people.
2. The hermit was digging the ground in front of his hut.
3. The king wished the hermit and asked his question.
4. The hermit took a minute to stop his work and wished the king and continued the work.
5. The King offered to help the hermit in digging the soil bed.

9.4

1. The bearded man was the King's enemy waiting to kill him.
2. The king and the hermit cleaned his wound and did first aid to him.
3. The King fell asleep on the threshold because he was tired from his walk and the work he had done.
4. The bearded man thanked the king as he saved his life and also he said that he'll be a loyal slave to the king and also will ask his sons to do so.
5. The outcome of the encounter was that the King made peace with his enemy, saved his life, and offered him assistance and friendship.

9.5

1. The hermit replied that the king had already got his answers.
2. His answer to the first question is that the present time is the right time to start any job.
3. The important person is whoever he is with at the present moment.
4. To do that person's good is the important task.

5. The king was satisfied and happy with the answer.

9.6

1.
 - i. Are
 - ii. Hasn't
 - iii. Have
 - iv. May
 - v. Could

2.
 - i. What
 - ii. Where
 - iii. Why
 - iv. Which
 - v. When
 - vi. How

3.
 - (i) Where have you been?
 - (ii) Where are Amit and Amar sitting?
 - (iii) What is your name?
 - (iv) Which book do you like better?
 - (v) Who ate the cake?
 - (vi) Which shirt will you give me?

4. where; which; What; where; Do.

9.7

1.
 - i. fat
 - ii. hurt
 - iii. remembered
 - iv. late



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Notes

- v. everything
- 2. persuade - dissuade agree - disagree work - play success - failure brief - extended social - anti-social inhuman - human bright - dark criticize - praise soften - harden
- 3. i) softened; criticism
ii) disagreement; dark
iii) failure; success
iv) inhuman, anti-social