

Three Questions Part 1

Leo Tolstoy

SUMMARY PART 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.

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 teach 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.

And 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.

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. Leaving his bodyguard behind, he 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.

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 recommenced 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.”

“Here comes someone running,” said the hermit.

“Let us see who it is.”

1. What are the three questions of the king?

The three questions that occurred to the king were :

- what is the most important time to start any work?
- who is the most important person for him?
- what is the most important thing to do?

2. Why did the king want to know answers to three questions?

Answer.

.The King was eager to know the answers to the three questions because of a thought that came to his mind that he would never fail if he knew the answers to the three questions.

3. Why was the king advised to go to magicians?

Answer..

Some people 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 to do something, it was necessary to look

into future. Only magicians could look into future. The king, therefore, would have to go to the magicians.

4. In answer to the second question, whose advice did the people say would be important to the king?

Answer

In answer to the second question, some said that the people most necessary to the king were his councilors, other said, the priests. A few others also chose the doctors. Yet the others said that his soldiers were the most necessary.

5. What suggestions were made in answer to the third question?

Answer:

In answer to the third question, some said that the most important thing was science. Others said fighting; and yet others chose religious worship.

6. Did the wise men win the reward? If not, why not?

Answer:

No, the wise men did not win the reward. As he got very different answers to his questions, the king was not satisfied, and therefore, he chose not to give the reward to anyone.