

NCERT: In the Kingdom of Fools

In the **Kingdom** of Fools, both the king and the minister were idiots. They didn't want to run things like other kings, so they decided to change night into day and day into night. They ordered that everyone should be **awake** at night, till their fields and run their businesses only after dark, and go to bed as soon as the sun came up. Anyone who **disobeyed** would be punished with death. The people did as they were told for fear of death. The king and the minister were



delighted at the success of their project. One day a guru and his **disciple** arrived in the city. It was a beautiful city, it was broad daylight, but there was no one about. Everyone was **asleep**, not a mouse **stirring**. Even the cattle had been taught to sleep by day. The two strangers were **amazed** by what they saw around them and **wandered** around town till evening, when suddenly the whole town **woke up** and went about its nightly business.

The two men were hungry. Now that the shops were open, they went to buy some groceries. To their **astonishment**, they found that everything cost the same, a single duddu — whether they bought a measure of rice or a bunch of bananas, it cost a duddu. The guru and his disciple were **delighted**. They had never heard of anything like this. They could buy all the food they wanted for a rupee.



When they had cooked and eaten, the guru realised that this was a kingdom of fools and it wouldn't be a good idea for them to stay there. "This is no place for us. Let's go," he said to his disciple. But the disciple didn't want to leave the place. Everything was **cheap** here. All he wanted was good, cheap food. The guru said, "They are all fools. This won't **last** very long, and you can't tell what they'll do to you next. "

But the disciple wouldn't listen to the guru's **wisdom**. He wanted to stay. The guru finally **gave up** and said, "Do what you want. I'm going," and left. The disciple stayed on, **ate his fill** everyday — bananas and ghee and rice and wheat, and grew fat like a street-side **sacred bull**.

One bright day, a thief **broke into** a rich merchant's house. He had made a hole in the wall and **sneaked in**, and as he was **carrying out** his **loot**, the wall of the old house **collapsed** on his head and killed him on the spot. His brother ran to the king and complained, "Your **Highness**, when my brother was **pursuing** his ancient trade, a wall fell on him and killed him. This merchant is to blame. He should have built a good, strong wall. You must punish the **wrongdoer** and **compensate** the family for this injustice. "

The king said, "Justice will be done. Don't worry," and at once **summoned** the owner of the house.

When the merchant arrived, the king questioned him.

"What's your name?"

"Such and Such, Your Highness.

"Were you at home when the dead man **burgled** your house?"

"Yes, My Lord. He broke in and the wall was weak. It fell on him.

"The **accused pleads** guilty. Your wall killed this man's brother. You have murdered a man. We have to punish you.

"Lord," said the helpless merchant, "I didn't **put up** the wall. It's really the fault of the man who built the wall. He didn't build it right. You should punish him.

"Who is that?"

"My Lord, this wall was built in my father's time. I know the man. He's an old man now. He lives nearby.

"The king sent out messengers to bring in the **bricklayer** who had built the wall. They brought him, tied hand and foot.

"You there, did you build this man's wall in his father's time?"

"Yes, My Lord, I did.



"What kind of a wall is this that you built? It has fallen on a poor man and killed him. You've murdered him. We have to punish you by death.

"Before the king could order the **execution**, the poor bricklayer pleaded, "Please listen to me before you give your orders. It's true I built this wall and it was no good. But that was because my mind was not on it. I remember very well a dancing girl, who was going up and down that street all day with her **anklets jingling**, and I couldn't keep my eyes or my mind on the wall I was building. You must get that dancing girl. I know where she lives. "

You're right. The case **deepens**. We must **look into** it. It is not easy to judge such **complicated** cases. Let's get that dancer, wherever she is. "

The dancing girl, now an old woman, came **trembling** to the court.

"Did you walk up and down that street many years ago, while this poor man was building a wall? Did you see him?"

"Yes, My Lord, I remember it very well."

"So you did walk up and down, with your anklets jingling. You were young and you distracted him, so he built a bad wall.

It has fallen on a poor burglar and killed him. You've killed an innocent man. You'll have to be punished.

"She thought for a minute and said, "My Lord, wait. I know now why I was walking up and down that street. I had given some gold to the **goldsmith** to make some jewellery for me. He was a lazy **scoundrel**. He made so many excuses, said he would give it now and he would give it then and so on all day. He made me walk up and down to his house a dozen times. That was when this bricklayer saw me. It's not my fault, My Lord, it's the **damned** goldsmith's fault."

"Poor thing, she's absolutely right, "thought the king, **weighing** the evidence. "We've got the real **culprit** at last. Get the goldsmith, wherever he is hiding. At once!

"The king's **bailiffs** searched for the goldsmith, who was hiding in a corner of his shop. When he heard the **accusation** against him, he had his own story to tell.

"My Lord," he said, "I'm a poor goldsmith. It's true I made this dancer come many times to my door. I gave her excuses because I couldn't finish making her jewellery before I finished the rich



merchant's orders. They had a wedding coming, and they wouldn't wait. You know how **impatient** rich men are!"

"Who is this rich merchant who kept you from finishing this poor woman's jewellery, made her walk up and down, which distracted this bricklayer, which made a **mess** of his wall, which has now fallen on an innocent man and killed him? Can you name him?"

"The goldsmith named the merchant, and he was none other than the original owner of the house whose wall had fallen. Now justice had **come full circle**, thought the king, back to the merchant. When he was rudely summoned back to the court, he arrived crying, "It wasn't me but my father who ordered the jewellery! He's dead! I'm innocent!"

"But the king consulted his minister and **ruled decisively**: "It's true your father is the true murderer. He's dead, but somebody must be punished in his place. You've **inherited** everything from that criminal father of yours, his riches as well as his **sins**. I knew at once, even when I first set eyes on you, that you were at the root of this horrible crime. You must die."

"And he ordered a new **stake** to be made ready for the execution. As the servants **sharpened** the stake and got it ready for the final **impaling** of the criminal, it occurred to the minister that the rich merchant was somehow too thin to be properly **executed** on the stake. He appealed to the king's commonsense. The king too worried about it.

"What shall we do?" he said, when suddenly it struck him that all they needed to do was to find a man fat enough to fit the stake. The servants were immediately sent all over the town looking for a man who would fit the stake, and their eyes fell on the disciple who had **fattened** himself for months on bananas and rice and wheat and ghee.

"What have I done wrong? I'm innocent. I'm a sanyasi!" he cried. "That may be true. But it's the royal **decree** that we should find a man fat enough to fit the stake," they said, and carried him to the place of execution. He remembered his **wise** guru's words: "This is a city of fools. You don't know what they will do next." While he was waiting for death, he prayed to his guru in his heart, asking him to hear his cry wherever he was. The guru saw everything in a **vision**; he had magic powers, he could see far, and he could see the future as he could see the present and the past. He arrived at once to save his disciple, who had got himself into such a **scrape** through love of food.



As soon as he arrived, he **scolded** the disciple and told him something in a **whisper**. Then he went to the king and **addressed** him, “O wisest of kings, who is greater? The guru or the disciple?”

“Of course, the guru. No doubt about it. Why do you ask?”

“Then put me to the stake first. Put my disciple to death after me.

When the disciple heard this, he understood and began to **clamour**, “Me first! You brought me here first! Put me to death first, not him!

“The guru and the disciple now got into a fight about who should go first. The king was **puzzled** by this behaviour. He asked the guru, “Why do you want to die? We chose him because we needed a fat man for the stake.”

“You shouldn’t ask me such questions. Put me to death first,” replied the guru.

“Why? There’s some **mystery** here. As a wise man you must make me understand.”

“Will you promise to put me to death if I tell you?” asked the guru. The king gave him his **solemn** word. The guru took him aside, out of the servants’ **earshot**, and whispered to him, “Do you know why we want to die right now, the two of us? We’ve been all over the world but we’ve never found a city like this or a king like you. That stake is the stake of the god of justice. It’s new, it has never had a criminal on it. Whoever dies on it first will be reborn as the king of this country. And whoever goes next will be the future minister of this country. We’re **sick of** our **ascetic** life. It would be nice to enjoy ourselves as king and minister for a while. Now **keep your word**, My Lord, and put us to death. Me first, remember?”



“The king was now thrown into deep thought. He didn’t want to lose the kingdom to someone else in the next round of life. He needed time. So he ordered the execution postponed to the next day and talked in secret with his minister. “It’s not right for us to give over the kingdom to others in the next life. Let’s go on the stake ourselves and we’ll be reborn as king and minister again. **Holy** men do not tell lies,” he said, and the minister agreed.

So he told the executioners, “We’ll send the criminals tonight. When the first man comes to you, put him to death first. Then do the same to the second man. Those are my orders. Don’t make any mistake.

”That night, the king and his minister went secretly to the prison, released the guru and the disciple, **disguised** themselves as the two, and as arranged **beforehand** with loyal servants, were taken to the stake and **promptly** executed.

When the bodies were taken down to be thrown to crows and vultures the people panicked. They saw before them the dead bodies of the king and the minister. The city was in confusion.

All night they **mourned** and discussed the future of the kingdom. Some people suddenly thought of the guru and the disciple and caught up with them as they were preparing to leave town unnoticed. “We people need a king and a minister,” said someone. Others agreed. They **begged** the guru and the disciple to be their king and their minister. It didn’t take many arguments to **persuade** the disciple, but it took longer to persuade the guru. They finally agreed to rule the kingdom of the foolish king and the silly minister, on the condition that they could change all the old laws.



From then on, night would again be night and day would again be day, and you could get nothing for a duddu. It became like any other place.

Vocabulary

- Kingdom** (noun) – Realm, empire, dominion, territory, principality. साम्राज्य
- Awake** (verb) – Rouse, awaken, stir, get up, arouse. जागना
- Disobey** (verb) – Defy, breach, violate, flout, infringe. अवज्ञा करना
- Delighted** (adjective) – Elated, pleased, thrilled, ecstatic, overjoyed. प्रसन्न
- Disciple** (noun) – Follower, devotee, adherent, pupil, student. शिष्य
- Asleep** (adjective) – Slumbering, dormant, resting, snoozing, napping. सो रहा है
- Stir** (verb) – Move, shift, budge, twitch, agitate. हिलना
- Amaze** (verb) – Astonish, surprise, stun, shock, bewilder. हैरान कर देना
- Wander** (verb) – Roam, stroll, meander, drift, saunter. भटकना
- Wake up** (phrasal verb) – Rouse, arise, get up, awaken. जाग जाना
- Astonishment** (noun) – Amazement, wonderment, bewilderment, surprise, shock. आश्चर्य
- Cheap** (adjective) – Inexpensive, economical, budget-friendly, low-priced, affordable. सस्ता
- Last** (verb) – Endure, continue, persist, remain, survive. टिकना
- Wisdom** (noun) – Insight, sagacity, prudence, discernment, understanding. बुद्धिमत्ता
- Give up** (phrasal verb) – Quit, abandon, forsake, relinquish, surrender. त्याग देना
- Eat one's fill** (phrase) – To eat until fully satisfied. पेट भरकर खाना
- Sacred** (adjective) – Holy, Divine, Blessed, Spiritual, Consecrated. पवित्र
- Break into** (phrasal verb) – Enter forcefully, Intrude, Penetrate, Barge in. तोड़कर अंदर जाना
- Sneak** (in) (verb) – Creep, Slip, Stealthily enter, Sneak in. चोरी छिपे अंदर जाना
- Carry out** (phrasal verb) – Execute, Perform, Conduct, Fulfill. अंजाम देना
- Loot** (noun) – Plunder, Booty, Pillage, Robbery. लूट

22. **Collapse** (verb) – Fall down, Cave in, Crumble, Break down. गिर पड़ना
23. **Highness** (noun) – Majesty, Royalness, Lordship. उच्चता (In the context of royalty, it denotes respect, e.g., आपकी उच्चता)
24. **Pursue** (verb) – Engage in, work at, practice, carry out पीछे लगे रहना
25. **Wrongdoer** (noun) – Offender, Culprit, Malefactor, Sinner. दोषी
26. **Compensate** (verb) – Reimburse, Repay, Recompense, Offset. क्षतिपूर्ति करना
27. **Summon** (verb) – Call upon, Order, Command, Send for. बुलाना
28. **Burgle** (verb) – Rob, Raid, Break into, Loot. चोरी करना
29. **The Accused** (noun) – Defendant, Suspect, The charged. आरोपी
30. **Plead** (verb) – Beg, Appeal, Implore, Entreat. निवेदन करना
31. **Put up** (phrasal verb) – Erect, Raise, Construct, Assemble. खड़ा करना
32. **Bricklayer** (noun) – Mason, Stoneworker, Builder, Constructor, Artisan ईंट लगाने वाला
33. **Execution** (noun) – Execution, Killing, Putting to death, Termination, Liquidation फाँसी
34. **Anklet** (noun) – Ankle Chain, Ankle Bracelet, Payal, Foot Ornament, Leg Bracelet पायल
35. **Jingle** (verb) – Chime, Tinkle, Ring, Clink, Chink झंझनाना
36. **Deepen** (verb) – Intensify, Enhance, Magnify, Augment, Strengthen गहरा करना
37. **Look into** (phrasal verb) – Investigate, Examine, Probe, Research, Scrutinize जांचना
38. **Complicated** (adjective) – Complex, Intricate, Involved, Confusing, Knotty जटिल
39. **Tremble** (verb) – Shake, Quiver, Quake, Shudder, Shiver काँपता हुआ आना
40. **Goldsmith** (noun) – Jeweler, Metalworker, Smith, Gold Worker, Artisan सुनार
41. **Scoundrel** (noun) – Rogue, Rascal, Villain, Miscreant, Wretch दुष्ट
42. **Damned** (adjective) – Cursed, Doomed, Condemned, Accursed, Ill-fated शापित

43. **Weigh** (verb) – Measure, Assess, Evaluate, Gauge, Consider मूल्यांकन करना
44. **Culprit** (noun) – Offender, Criminal, Wrongdoer, Malefactor, Guilty Party अपराधी
45. **Bailiff** (noun) – Sheriff, Officer, Constable, Marshal, Enforcer अदालती मुहरीर
46. **Accusation** (noun) – Allegation, Charge, Claim, Assertion, Indictment आरोप
47. **Impatient** (adjective) – Anxious, Eager, Restless, Fidgety, Antsy अधीर
48. **Mess** (noun) – Disorder, Clutter, Jumble, Muddle, Chaos अव्यवस्था
49. **Come full circle** (phrase) – To return to the original or a similar position, situation, or circumstance where one or something started
50. **Rule** (verb) – Decide, judge, declare, pronounce, decree निर्णय देना
51. **Decisively** (adverb) – Conclusively, Resolutely, Determinedly, Firmly, Unwaveringly निर्णायक रूप से
52. **Inherit** (verb) – Receive, acquire, bequeath, obtain, come into प्राप्त करना
53. **Sin** (noun) – Wrongdoing, transgression, misdeed, evil act, iniquity पाप
54. **Stake** (noun) – a wooden post to which a person was tied before being burned alive as a punishment.
55. **Sharpen** (verb) – Hone, whet, grind, refine, enhance नुकीला कर लेना
56. **Impaling** (noun) – Piercing, stabbing, skewering, spiking, spearing बेधना, चुभाना
57. **Execute** (verb) – to kill someone as a legal punishment फांसी करना, प्राणदंड देना
58. **Fat** (verb) – Fatten, plump up, bulk up, round out, fill out मोटा होना
59. **Decree** (noun) – Order, edict, command, mandate, proclamation आदेश
60. **Wise** (adjective) – Sagacious, intelligent, smart, astute, judicious बुद्धिमान
61. **Vision** (noun) – Perception, view, sight, perspective, outlook दृष्टिकोण
62. **Scrape** (noun) – Predicament, plight, problem दुर्दशा

63. **Scold** (verb) – Reprimand, chastise, rebuke, berate, admonish डाँटना
64. **Whisper** (noun) – a way of speaking very quietly, using the breath but not the voice, so that only the person close to you can hear you फुसफुसाना
65. **Address** (verb) – Speak to, talk to, communicate with, direct one's words to संबोधित करना
66. **Clamour** (verb) – Uproar, outcry, commotion, din, noise शोर मचाना
67. **Puzzle** (verb) – Confuse, baffle, perplex, bewilder, mystify उलझन में डालना
68. **Mystery** (noun) – Enigma, secret, riddle, puzzle, conundrum रहस्य
69. **Solemn** (adjective) – having or showing serious purpose and determination गंभीर
70. **Earshot** (noun) – the range of distance within which it is possible to be heard or to hear what someone is saying: आवाज़ की पहुंच
71. (be) **Sick** (of) (verb) – Fed up, tired of, bored of, weary of थक चुका है
72. **Ascetic** (adjective) – Austere, self-denying, abstinent, abstemious तपस्वी
73. **Keep your word** (phrase) – Abide by your promise, uphold your commitment, stick to your word, maintain your vow, stay true to your oath अपना वादा निभाना
74. **Holy** (adjective) – Sacred, divine, sanctified, consecrated, hallowed पवित्र
75. **Disguise** (verb) – Mask, camouflage, cloak, hide, conceal छुपाना
76. **Beforehand** (adjective) – Preliminary, prearranged, in advance, earlier, previously पहले ही
77. **Promptly** (adverb) – Quickly, immediately, without delay, instantly, right away त्वरित
78. **Mourn** (verb) – Lament, grieve, sorrow, bewail, rue शोक मनाना
79. **Beg** (verb) – Plead, entreat, implore, beseech, request गुजारिश करना
80. **Persuade** (verb) – Convince, coax, influence, sway, entice मनाना/राज़ी करना

Practice Exercise

1. **Why did the king and the minister of the Kingdom of Fools decide to change day into night and night into day?**
 - A. They wanted to be unique.
 - B. They believed it was more efficient.
 - C. They thought it would benefit the farmers.
 - D. They wanted to defy the natural order.
2. **What was the cost of every item in the Kingdom of Fools?**
 - A. A single rupee.
 - B. Different prices for different items.
 - C. A single duddu.
 - D. Prices based on demand and supply.
3. **Why did the guru suggest leaving the Kingdom of Fools?**
 - A. Because it was too expensive.
 - B. Because he feared they would be cheated.
 - C. He felt that the people were dangerous.
 - D. He believed it was a kingdom of fools and was unpredictable.
4. **What event triggered the chain of blame in the kingdom?**
 - A. The theft of jewels.
 - B. A thief dying due to a collapsing wall.
 - C. The dance of a young woman.
 - D. The construction of a bad wall.
5. **Who was initially blamed for the thief's death?**
 - A. The bricklayer.
 - B. The dancer.
 - C. The goldsmith.
 - D. The rich merchant.
6. **Why was the disciple chosen for execution?**
 - A. Because he was the real culprit.
 - B. Due to his wisdom.
 - C. Because of his size and weight.
 - D. Because he was a stranger in the kingdom.
7. **What did the guru claim would happen to the first person to die on the stake?**
 - A. He would be freed from all sins.
 - B. He would attain enlightenment.
 - C. He would be reborn as a commoner.
 - D. He would be reborn as the king of the country.
8. **Why did the king and minister decide to be executed on the stake?**

- A. They felt guilty.
 - B. They wanted to be reborn as king and minister again.
 - C. They believed the guru was trying to overthrow them.
 - D. They were afraid of the people's revolt.
9. **Who became the new king and minister after the original king and minister were executed?**
- A. Two chosen from the citizens.
 - B. The guru and the disciple.
 - C. The bricklayer and the dancer.
 - D. The goldsmith and the merchant.
10. **What change did the new rulers bring about the kingdom?**
- A. They changed the currency.
 - B. They changed night to day and vice versa again.
 - C. They made day as day and night as night again.
 - D. They increased the prices of commodities.

Answers

1. A 2. C 3. D 4. B 5. D 6. C 7. D 8. B 9. B 10. C

Explanation

1. A) The king and the minister wanted to differentiate their kingdom from others and didn't want to run things like other kings.
2. C) The passage states that everything, whether rice or bananas, cost a single duddu.
3. D) The guru realized the nature of the kingdom and felt that their actions couldn't be predicted, which might be dangerous.
4. B) The sequence of events leading to accusations began when a thief broke into a merchant's house, and the wall collapsed on him.
5. D) The merchant was first blamed because the wall of his house collapsed on the thief.
6. C) The disciple had become fat, and he was deemed the right fit for the stake prepared for the execution.
7. D) The guru told the king that the first person to die on the stake would be reborn as the king of that country.
8. B) They believed the guru's words and thought that by being executed, they would be reborn to their same positions.
9. B) The people of the kingdom approached the guru and the disciple to become their new king and minister.
10. C) The guru and the disciple changed the old laws, and everything became normal with night being night and day being day.