

The King and the Prime Minister

A king wanted to choose his prime minister. Four great scholars of the land were summoned. He placed them in a room and told them, "The door will be closed on you. The lock on this door is not ordinary; it opens with a mathematical puzzle. Until you solve that puzzle, you will not be able to open the lock. If you can solve the question correctly, you can open the door and come out."

The king left and closed the door. Three of the four men immediately set to work. There were numbers written on the lock; they copied the numbers and began working with them. The fourth man simply sat in a corner. The other three thought he was mad. He sat there with his eyes closed, doing nothing. After a while, he stood up, walked to the door, pushed it, it opened, and he walked out! Meanwhile, the other three were still diligently working. They didn't even see what had happened—how the fourth man had left the room.

When the king returned to the room with this man, he said, "Stop your work. The test is over. I have chosen my prime minister." They couldn't believe it and asked, "What happened? He wasn't doing anything; he was just sitting in a corner. How did he manage to solve the problem?" The man said, "There was no problem to solve. I simply sat down, and the first fundamental question that came to me was: 'Was the door actually locked?' The moment I felt that, I just meditated in silence. I became completely still and asked myself where to begin."

The first thing any intelligent person should ask is whether a problem truly exists, and how it can be solved. If you try to solve it without this clarity, you will regress infinitely and never escape. So, I just went to check if the door was really locked or not, and I saw the lock was open."

The king said, "Yes, that was the trick. The door wasn't locked. The lock was open. I was waiting for one of you to ask the real question, but you started trying to solve it immediately; you missed the crucial point right there. Even if you worked on it for your entire lives, you could never have solved it. This man knows how to remain aware in any situation. He asked the right question."