


**CLASSIC**  
a story with  
timeless appeal

# THE LOST KING



The war has  
been won.  
But the king's  
battle has  
just begun.

By Spencer Kayden

Based on the classic story

"The Three Questions" by Leo Tolstoy

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Allen Jarry's image "Spencer Kayden" is a work of fiction. All other names are trademarks of their respective owners.

## CHARACTERS

(Circle the character you will play. \*Indicates large speaking role)

**\*Stage Directors 1, 2, 3**

(SD1, SD2, SD3)

**\*King****Duke****Crowd, to be read by a group****Queen****Courtier****Elders 1, 2, 3****General****Doctor****Priest****\*Hermit****\*Wounded Man**

## As You Read

How does the king change?

## PROLOGUE

## An Empty Battlefield

**SD1:** The king stands in a muddy field.**SD2:** A low fog rolls across the broken earth as a cold breeze lifts the king's purple cape into the air.**King (to himself):** What have I done?**SD3:** The duke approaches him.**Duke:** Sire, we must return to the castle for the feast.**King:** How many?**Duke:** All your nobles will be there, of course, along with your generals—**King:** No. How many died on this battlefield?**Duke:** Sire, I—**King:** How many?**Duke:** You won a great victory for your people here.**King:** Tell me how many.**Duke:** Two thousand six hundred and two dead.**King (softly):** Two thousand six hundred and two souls.**Queen:** There's nothing you could have done.**King:** I no longer know what the right decisions are.**Queen:** You have always had sound judgment.**King:** I lie awake at night thinking that if only I had taken different actions . . .**Queen:** Those men gave their lives defending their kingdom. There is honor in that.**King:** But there is no honor in a king who is full of doubt.**SD2:** The queen takes his hand.**Queen:** How can I help you?**King:** Three questions haunt me. If I had the answers, perhaps I could believe in myself again.**Queen:** What questions?**King:** When is the right time for every action? Who are the right people to listen to? And what is the most important thing to do?**Queen:** Do those questions even have answers?**King:** I hope they do, or else I am utterly lost.

## SCENE 1

## The Great Dining Hall

**SD1:** The king sits at the head of a long oak table.**SD2:** The queen and nobles are feasting merrily.**SD3:** The duke stands and raises his glass.**Duke:** To our king for leading us to victory!**Crowd:** Long live the king!**SD1:** The king smiles weakly, then looks down and pushes food around his plate.**Queen:** My dear, what troubles you?**King:** All those men I sent to their deaths.**Queen:** Isn't that inevitable in war?**King:** Their voices torment me.

## SCENE 2

## The Throne Room

**SD3:** The king and queen sit on gilded thrones.**SD1:** A large group has gathered.**Courtiers:** Silence! Silence, I say!**Queen:** The king has promised a great reward to the one who can answer his three questions. Listen carefully.**King:** Question one: When is the right time for every action?**Elder 1:** Your majesty, I suggest you make a schedule and follow it strictly.**Elder 2:** Really? A *schedule*? Sire, you should form a Council of the Wise and act according to their advice.

**Elder 3:** Nonsense! Only magicians know what will happen in the future. You must consult them.

**SD2:** The queen suppresses a smirk.

**King (to the queen):** One says I should follow a schedule. Another says get the advice of a council. The third says ask a magician. This is not very promising.

**SD3:** The king turns back to the crowd.

**King:** Here is my second question: Who are the right people to listen to?

**General:** The warriors. We are honorable and courageous. Everything we do is to protect the kingdom.

**Doctor:** Of course *you'd* say that. Sire, you must listen to the physicians. What good is protection if you don't have your health?

**Priest:** Your majesty, I believe holy men are the answer. We have dedicated our lives to spiritual truth.

**SD1:** The king looks at the queen.

**Queen (shrugging):** Each of them has a point.

**King:** Final question: What is the most important thing to do?

**Doctor:** Pursue science. Without science, civilization becomes stagnant.

**General:** Defending the kingdom is most important. What good is progress if you cannot defend yourself?

**Priest:** You are both wrong. The most important thing to do is to have faith, for faith will guide you to all the right decisions.

**SD2:** The men begin arguing with one another.

**SD3:** The king puts his head in his hands.

**SD1:** The courtier steps toward the thrones.

**Courtier:** Your majesty, there is one who can perhaps more wisely answer your questions. He lives at the top of Cloud Mountain.

**General:** What? That old hermit?

**Priest:** He is full of nonsense.

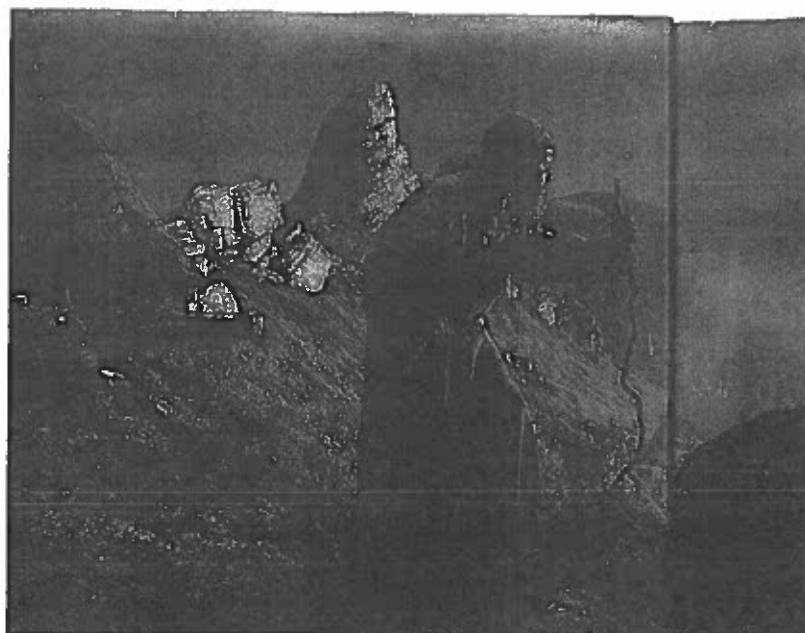
**Doctor:** He is out of his head.

**Courtier:** He is said to be enlightened. But be warned, your highness, he counsels only the poor.

### SCENE 3

#### The Top of Cloud Mountain

**SD2:** The king, dressed in a shabby cloak and a rumpled hat, arrives at the top of the mountain, out of breath.



**SD3:** He takes a sip of water from his canteen.

**King:** I hope the hermit doesn't recognize me.

**SD1:** He comes to a clearing, where he finds the hermit digging a garden.

**King:** Wise one, I have come seeking your wisdom.

**Hermit:** As others have before you.

**King:** I have three questions.

**SD2:** The hermit keeps digging, his old bones creaking.

**King:** When is the right time for every action? Who are the right people to listen to? What is the most important thing to do?

**SD3:** The hermit pats the king on the shoulder, then continues digging, his breath ragged.

**King:** Let me help you.

**Hermit (sitting down with a groan):** Thank you.

**SD1:** The king takes the spade while the hermit rests.

**SD2:** As he digs, the king asks his questions again.

**King:** Please, I need to know. When is the right time for every action? Who are the right people to listen to? What is the most important thing to do?

**SD3:** The hermit says nothing.

**SD1:** The king keeps digging as the light dims. He is covered in dirt and sweat. He puts down the spade.

**King:** It is getting late. If you cannot answer my questions, I will begin my journey home.

**SD2:** Suddenly, a man runs towards them, pressing his hands against a bloody wound in his stomach.

**SD3:** He stumbles and collapses on the ground.

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## Journey Up the Mountain

In this story, the king disguises himself before seeking wisdom from the hermit. Do you think the hermit recognizes the king anyway?

**King:** Who is this?

**SD1:** The hermit shrugs.

**SD2:** The king kneels and peels away the man's shirt.

**King:** A deep gash! We must stop the flow of blood.

**SD3:** The king takes off his cloak and presses it against the wound. The cloak is quickly soaked with blood.

**SD1:** The king wrings out his cloak and reapplies it to the wound. He repeats this until the bleeding stops.

**SD2:** The wounded man begins to stir.

**Wounded Man (weakly):** Wa . . . wa . . . water.

**SD3:** The king gently pours water into the man's mouth.

**Hermit:** Let's carry him inside. Then you can both rest.

## SCENE 4

### The Hermit's Hut

**SD1:** The king awakens in a sparse hut. He looks around.

**SD2:** He sees the hermit and the wounded man. The wounded man is staring intently at the king.

**Wounded Man:** Please forgive me.

**King:** Why? You've done nothing that needs forgiving.

**Wounded Man:** But I have, your majesty.

**King:** You know me?

**Wounded Man:** Until now, I was your sworn enemy.

**King:** Who are you?

**Wounded Man:** During the war, my brother died in battle, and you stole our land. I heard you were seeking the hermit and seized my chance for vengeance.

**SD3:** The man tries to sit up and winces in pain.

**Wounded Man (clutching his stomach):** I was going to ambush you on your way back down the mountain. I waited, but you never came.

**King:** How were you injured?

**Wounded Man:** I came out of my hiding place to look for you. Your attendants recognized me and stabbed me. I escaped and ran here.

**SD1:** The wounded man's eyes fill with gratitude.

**Wounded Man:** I came to kill you, but you saved my life.

**SD2:** The king brings the canteen to the man's lips. The man takes a long drink.

**Wounded Man:** I vow to be your loyal subject for the rest of my life. Please grant me your forgiveness.

**King:** I would be honored to make a friend of my former enemy. Your land shall be restored to you.

**Wounded Man:** I had heard you were a kind and fair ruler, but I did not believe it.

**SD3:** The king smiles.

**King:** I must return to the castle. I will send my attendants to take you home and my doctors to treat your wound.

**SD1:** The king and the wounded man shake hands.

## SCENE 5

### The Hermit's Garden

**SD2:** The hermit walks the king outside.

**King:** Wise one, I will ask my questions one final time before I leave.

**Hermit:** But your questions are already answered.

**King:** How is that?

**Hermit:** If you had not taken pity on me and helped dig my garden, you would have been attacked by that man on your way home.

**King:** Yes, that is likely.

**Hermit:** Therefore, the most important time was when you were digging, the most important person was me, and the most important thing to do was to help me.

**SD3:** The king looks at the rows he dug in the soil.

**Hermit:** When the wounded man appeared, the most important time was when you dressed his wound. He was the most important person, and saving his life was the most important thing to do.



**SD1:** The king looks at the blood on his cloak.

**Hermit:** There is only one important time, and that is now. The present is the only time over which we have any control.

**King:** You are right. We cannot change the past, and we cannot predict the future.

**Hermit:** The most important person is the one you are with in each moment. The most important thing to do is to make that person happy. That is the pursuit of life.

## SCENE 6

### The Great Dining Hall

**SD2:** Once again, the king sits at the head of a resplendent table.

**SD3:** He is slurping a hearty beet soup.

**SD1:** The duke takes a bite of roasted squash.

**Duke** (*his mouth full*): What magnificent vegetables!

**King:** Do you recall the wounded man I told you about?

**Duke:** Yes, of course.

**King:** He brought us these vegetables from his farm.

**Queen:** His farm is on the land the king restored to him.

**King:** He also takes food to the hermit.

**Duke:** The hermit who answered your questions by not answering them?

**King:** Indeed. I marvel at the simplicity of what he taught me. I am filled with peace, for now I understand that what is most important is always right in front of me. ●

## Informational Text

# Being in the Moment

Experts say mindfulness can benefit us in many ways. By Maggie Pierce

In the play you just read, the hermit advises the king to live in the present. Today, we call this idea mindfulness.

Being mindful means being alert and aware in the present moment—experiencing life as you live it. You taste each bite of that

crisp apple. You read *The Outsiders* with total focus. You notice your emotions as your friend shares her good news. In other words, you are completely aware of your surroundings as well as your thoughts and feelings.

Mindfulness also involves acceptance: noticing your



thoughts and feelings without judging them.

Being mindful may boost our immune systems, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve our concentration and problem-solving skills. It's no wonder that many schools are adding mindfulness practice to their classrooms.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness. Here is a simple one: Sit quietly for five minutes and focus on your breathing. If your mind wanders, bring it back to your breathing. Practicing mindfulness for even a few minutes a day can benefit you. Try it out and see what happens! ●

## Writing Contest

Maggie Pierce writes that mindfulness is "experiencing life as you live it." What does she mean? How does this idea relate to the play? Answer both questions in an essay. Send it to **King Contest**. Five winners will get *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life* by Wendy Mass.

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