

# The Snake and The Mirror

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## Answers to NCERT Questions

### THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT

Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph (30–40 words).

**1. “The sound was a familiar one. What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was? How many times did he hear it? (Find the places in the text.) When and why did the sounds stop?**

**Ans:** The doctor heard a familiar sound of rats scurrying through the beams of the roof. He did not bother with the sound as he assumed it was the rats, but he heard the sound three times, and says, “again I heard the sound from above, “again came that noise from above, “suddenly there came a dull thud, as if a rubber tube had fallen to the ground. As he turned, he saw a fat snake wriggling over the back of his chair, landed on his shoulder, and the sound also stopped.

**2. What two “important and “earth-shaking decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?**

**Ans:** The first important decision the doctor took while looking into the mirror was that he would shave daily and grow a thin moustache to look more handsome. The second decision he took was that he would always keep the smile on his face to look more handsome.

**3. “I looked into the mirror and smiled, says the doctor. A little later he says, “I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself. What is the doctor’s opinion about himself when: (i) he first smiles, and (ii) he smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?**

**Ans:** When the doctor first smiled in front of the mirror, he was admiring his smile. He decided to uphold that smile to look more appealing, as he was young, a bachelor and a doctor too. Later, when the snake coiled round his arm, he smiled feebly as if to laugh at his helplessness. His thoughts changed because of the encounter with the snake.

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**This story about a frightening incident is narrated in a humorous way. What makes it humorous? (Think of the contrasts it presents between dreams and reality. Some of them are listed below.)**

1. (i) The kind of person the doctor is (money, possessions)
- (ii) The kind of person he wants to be (appearance, ambition)

**Ans:** The story presents a contrast between dreams and reality in a humorous way. Since the doctor had just started on his practising, his earnings were rather meagre. He was living in a small rented house with no electricity. He had few clothes and only sixty rupees in his suitcase. His room was infested with rats. However, his dreams and ambitions were totally in contrast to his condition. He was a great admirer of beauty and believed in looking handsome. He emphasised that he was a bachelor, and a doctor. He was very pleased with his appearance. He decided to shave daily and grow a thin moustache to look more handsome and appealing. The manner in which he decided that this was an important decision was quite funny. Later, he also made an earth-shaking decision to constantly smile to look even more handsome. This contrast between the sort of person he was and the sort of person he wanted to be, makes the story humorous.

2. (i) The person he wants to marry

(ii) The person he actually marries

**Ans:** The doctor had thought that he would marry a rich lady doctor who would have a good medical practice because he had none of those to his credit. She would have to be fat, so that if he ever made a mistake and needed to run, she would not be able to catch him because of her physique. When he was running away from the snake, someone asks him if his wife was fat. To which he replies that unfortunately, God had willed otherwise and he had been married to a thin reedy sprinter, which was probably the snake that he was referring to.

3. (i) His thoughts when he looks into the mirror

(ii) His thoughts when the snake is coiled around his arm

**Ans:** When the doctor looked into the mirror, he appreciated his good looks, admired beauty and believed in maintaining his appearance to better his marriage prospects. He decided that he would shave daily and grow a thin moustache, to look more handsome. When he smiled, he thought he looked, even more attractive, so he decided to keep smiling always. However, when the snake curled round his arm, he turned into a stone. He felt his end had come and felt God's presence. He realised that if the snake struck his fangs at him, he did not have any medicine in his room. That was when it dawned on him, what a poor, foolish and stupid doctor he was. The sequence of events also adds humour to the story.

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## THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGE

Here are some sentences from the text. Say which of them tell you, that the author:

(a) was afraid of the snake, (b) was proud of his appearance, (c) had a sense of humour, (d) was no longer afraid of the snake.

1. I was turned to stone.

**Ans:** Was afraid of the snake

2. I was no mere image cut in granite.

**Ans:** Had a sense of humour

3. The arm was beginning to be drained of strength.

**Ans:** Was afraid of the snake

4. I tried in my imagination to write in bright letters outside my little heart the words, 'O God'.

**Ans:** Was afraid of the snake

5. I didn't tremble. I didn't cry out.

**Ans:** Was afraid of the snake

6. I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile.

**Ans:** Was proud of his appearance

7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.

**Ans:** Was no longer afraid of the snake

8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!

**Ans:** Was proud of his appearance

9. The fellow had such a sense of cleanliness...! The rascal could have taken it and used it after washing it with soap and water.

**Ans:** Had a sense of humour

10. Was it trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its forehead.

**Ans:** Had a sense of humour

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### **Expressions used to show fear**

**Can you find the expressions in the story that tell you that the author was frightened? Read the story and complete the following sentences.**

1. I was turned .....

**Ans:** I was turned to stone.

2. I sat there holding .....

**Ans:** I sat there holding my breath.

3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like .....

**Ans:** In the light of the lamp I sat there like a stone image in the flesh.

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**In the sentences given below some words and expressions are italicised. They are used variously mean that one:**

- is very frightened.
- is too scared to move.
- is frightened by something that happens suddenly.
- makes another feel frightened.

Match the meanings with the words/expressions in italics, and write the appropriate meaning next to the sentence. The first one has been done for you.

(i) I knew a man was following me, I was scared out of my wits. (very frightened)

**Ans:** very frightened

(ii) I got a fright when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge.

**Ans:** frightened by something that happens suddenly

(iii) He nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw the bull coming towards him.

**Ans:** very frightened

(iv) You really gave me a fright when you crept up behind me like that.

**Ans:** frightened by something that happens suddenly

(v) Wait until I tell his story — it will make your hair stand on end.

**Ans:** makes another feel frightened

(vi) Paralysed with fear, the boy faced his abductors.

**Ans:** too scared to move

(vii) The boy hid behind the door, not moving a muscle.

**Ans:** too scared to move

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### **Reported questions**

**Report these questions using *if/whether* or *why/when/where/how/which/what*. Remember the italicised verbs change into the past tense.**

1. Meena asked her friend, "Do you think your teacher will come today?"

**Ans:** Meena asked her friend if she thought her teacher would come that day.

**2.** David asked his colleague, "Where will you go this summer?"

**Ans:** David asked his colleague where he would go that summer.

**3.** He asked the little boy, "Why are you studying English?"

**Ans:** He asked the little boy why he was studying English.

**4.** She asked me, "When are we going to leave?"

**Ans:** She asked me when we were going to leave.

**5.** Pran asked me, "Have you finished reading the newspaper?"

**Ans:** Pran asked me if I had finished reading the newspaper.

**6.** Seema asked her, "How long have you lived here?"

**Ans:** Seema asked her how long she had lived there.

**7.** Sheila asked the children, "Are you ready to do the work?"

**Ans:** Sheila asked the children if they were ready to do the work.

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## **WRITING**

**1. Try to rewrite the story without its humour, merely as a frightening incident. What details or parts of the story would you leave out?**

**Ans:**

- The doctor's admiration of himself
- Talking about his smile
- His expectations of his wife
- Wanting to marry a fat lady
- To be able to run and escape from her
- The imaginary communication with God
- Running out of the home
- The neighbour's query about his wife
- His response "a thin reedy sprinter"
- Robbery; Vest
- And the conclusion about the snake being taken by its own beauty

2. Read the description given alongside from a photograph in a newspaper (Times of India, 4th September 1999). Make up a story about what the monkey is thinking or why it is looking into a mirror. Write a paragraph about it.

### THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL



*A monkey preens itself using a piece of mirror in the Delhi ridge.*

(‘To preen oneself’ means to spend a lot of time making oneself look attractive, and then admiring one’s appearance. The word is used in disapproval.)

**Ans:** The fairest of them all

A monkey preens itself using a piece of mirror in the Delhi ridge. He has perched himself on the branch of a tree, far away from the rest of his family and friends. He was curious to know who was looking back at him from the mirror. He began twisting and turning, shouting and screaming. The other monkey repeated the same actions. He was getting agitated. He placed the mirror on the fork of the tree and started banging his chest. What is happening? He wondered and sat pondering on the problem at hand. “I need my family, he said to himself. “I am sure little Timpoo will know how to get rid of the intruder. So, he called out to him. Timpoo had learned about mirrors and reflection in his science class. Rima, the science teacher at Monkey school, had taught him about this just two days back. He went up to the senior monkey, and asked him to show him the mirror. “Be careful Timpoo, there is a huge monkey there. He might just get at you, he said. “Don’t worry uncle, replied Timpoo. Unfortunately, just as he was getting close to the mirror and trying to take it in his hands, it fell down and broke into pieces. Now, there were numerous monkeys, all of who were trying to attack the elder monkey. He went into a panic, ran away from there, never to be seen again. Timpoo felt very sad for having been so careless. The last information available was that ‘uncle’ monkey had been hospitalised, he slipped into a coma, and succumbed thereafter. All thanks to a mirror!!

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## **Additional Questions**

### **Extract Based Questions**

**Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow: (4 Marks each)**

**1. It was a hot summer night; about ten o'clock. I had my meal at the restaurant and returned to my room. I heard a noise from above as I opened the door. The sound was a familiar one. One could say that the rats and I shared the room. I took out my box of matches and lighted the kerosene lamp on the table.**

- (a)** When and from where was the doctor returning?
- (b)** How did he illuminate his room?
- (c)** What were some of the things he could call his own?
- (d)** Which word in the passage is the synonym of 'lonely'?

**Ans:**

**(a)** It was a hot summer night at ten o'clock, the doctor was returning to his small rented room after he had his meal at a restaurant.

**(b)** He illuminated his rented room with the kerosene lamp as his house was not electrified.

**(c)** He had only sixty rupees with him. As clothings, he had some shirts, dhotis and a black coat which he was wearing.

**(d)** Solitary

**Ans:**

**(a)** It was a hot summer night at ten o'clock, the doctor was returning to his small rented room after he had his meal at a restaurant.

**(b)** He illuminated his rented room with the kerosene lamp as his house was not electrified.

**(c)** He had only sixty rupees with him. As clothings, he had some shirts, dhotis and a black coat which he was wearing.

**(d)** Solitary

**2. I took off my black coat, white shirt and not-so white vest and hung them up. I opened the two windows in the room. It was an outer room with one wall facing the open yard. It had a tiled roof with long supporting gables that rested on the beam over the wall. There was no ceiling. There was a regular traffic of rats to and from the beam. I made my bed and pulled it close to the wall. I lay down but I**

**could not sleep. I got up and went out to the veranda for a little air, but the wind god seemed to have taken time off.**

- (a) What clothes did the narrator hang on the wall?
- (b) What 'regular' traffic did the narrator talk of?
- (c) Why did the narrator go to the veranda?
- (d) "Wind god seemed to have taken time off. Explain.

**Ans:**

- (a) The narrator hung his coat, his shirt and not so white vest.
- (b) It was the continuous movement of rats over the beam.
- (c) The narrator went out to the veranda for a little air as it was a hot day.
- (d) It means that there was no breeze.

**3. One feels tempted to look into a mirror when it is near one. I took a look. In those days I was a great admirer of beauty and I believed in making myself look handsome. I was unmarried and I was a doctor. I felt I had to make my presence felt. I picked up the comb and ran it through my hair and adjusted the parting so that it looked straight and neat.**

- (a) Why did the narrator look into the mirror?
- (b) Why do you think he wanted his presence felt?
- (c) What did he specially do with his hair?
- (d) Which word in the passage means 'bachelor'?

**Ans:**

- (a) He looked into the mirror as he was an admirer of beauty and believed in taking efforts to look handsome.
- (b) He wanted his presence felt as he was a bachelor and a doctor, and who was on the lookout for a good rich wife.
- (c) He ran a comb through his hair and adjusted the parting to look neat and straight.
- (d) Unmarried

**4. I took a close look at my face in the mirror. I made an important decision — I would shave daily and grow a thin moustache to look more handsome. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor!**



**I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile. I made another earth-shaking decision. I would always keep that attractive smile on my face .. . to look more handsome. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!**

**Again came that noise from above.**

- (a) What two important decisions did the narrator make?
- (b) Why do you think he wanted to look handsome?
- (c) A person who is self obsessed is called \_\_\_\_\_. (a) Optimist (b) Narcissist
- (d) What impression of the doctor is created in your mind?

**Ans:**

**(a)** The two decisions were that he would shave daily, grow a thin beard and keep a perpetual smile on his face.

**(b)** The narrator wanted to look handsome because he was young, a doctor, and an eligible bachelor.

**(c)** Narcissist

**(d)** The doctor is a vain and self-centered person.

**5. Suddenly there came a dull thud as if a rubber tube had fallen to the ground ... surely nothing to worry about. Even so I thought I would turn around and take a look. No sooner had I turned than a fat snake wriggled over the back of the chair and landed on my shoulder. The snake's landing on me and my turning were simultaneous.**

I didn't jump. I didn't tremble. I didn't cry out. There was no time to do any such thing. The snake slithered along my shoulder and coiled around my left arm above the elbow. The hood was spread out and its head was hardly three or four inches from my face!

- (a)** What did the narrator see when he was turning around?
- (b)** Why did the narrator neither 'tremble' nor 'cry out'?
- (c)** What did the snake do?
- (d)** Why was the narrator not worried when he heard the dull thud?

**Ans:**

**(a)** The narrator saw a fat snake land on his shoulder.

**(b)** The narrator neither trembled nor cried out as there was no time to do any such thing. He was too frightened to think.

(c) The snake slithered along the narrator's shoulder, coiled around his left arm elbow, and raised its hood, four inches away from his face.

(d) The narrator would have assumed that it was the sound being made by the rats.

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### **Short Answer Questions (30-40 words: 2 Marks each)**

#### **1. Who was the narrator of the story and where did he live?**

**Ans:** The narrator of the story is a homeopathic doctor who lived in a rented house in a small village of Kerala. He had just begun his practice, and was therefore, not very secure financially. The house was a tiled outhouse that had not been electrified. The house was the bastion (battlefield) of rats.

#### **2. What important lesson did the narrator learn from the snake?**

**Ans:** The narrator has been shown as a very vain person, who was very self-centered. He did not experience any embarrassment in expressing the desire to marry a rich, fat lady, as it would be convenient for his lifestyle. He would not have to struggle. With the arrival of the snake, and the panic he experienced, he realised that nothing was really important when faced with death.

#### **3. Why did the doctor think that "death lurked four inches away?"**

**Ans:** The doctor thought so because the snake had coiled around his left arm above the elbow. The snake's hood was spread out four inches away from his face. If the snake struck him, he would surely die of snake bite, as he knew it was a very poisonous snake.

#### **4. Why was the narrator unsure of God's reactions to his prayer? What did he do?**

**Ans:** The narrator experienced the presence of God Vishnu, the creator. He knew for sure that He was there. He was however, not very sure as to how God would react to the prayers of a vain and selfish person like him. Eventually, he decided to write "Oh God, outside his heart, with the hope of receiving his sublime grace.

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### **Long Answer Questions (100-150 words: 8 Marks each)**

#### **1. Write a paragraph about your experience on the fateful evening. You are the narrator.**

**Ans:** The lights didn't come on because the outhouse was not electrified. I lit the lamp, and went to my favourite spot, in front of the mirror. I knew I looked handsome, and enjoyed being vainglorious (excessively proud of oneself or one's achievements, looks; overly vain).

As usual my companions, the rats were making their presence felt by running around the beam. After a while, I thought of retiring as sleep was evading me because it was extremely hot. I got up and went in front of the mirror, wanting to read my text. Well that did not happen because I was distracted by my reflection. While admiring myself, I suddenly heard a thud, it was something falling. I turned around and noticed that it was a poisonous snake, that eventually climbed on to my hand. I turned immobile. The dangerous reptile, took me on a trip to the life beyond “the valley of death.

## **2. What is the author trying to convey through the protagonist of his story?**

**Ans:** Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, was a very famous author of Malayalam literature, who was famous for his satirical form of writing. In this story, he has taken a poke at the egoistic nature of the male members of the erstwhile society of Kerala. The nature of the protagonist was typical of the “malayalee man. His fondness for external beauty, vanity, dependence on the female and her family for survival, and most importantly false prestige. They would like to reach the moon without the slightest effort. Ideally, just like the doctor here, who wanted the silver spoon which he did not have the calibre to buy for himself. Life was treated with scant respect. A jolt from the God is only that gives them the realisation and awareness of the real world. The doctor needed the snake to teach him that life is not a bed of roses. But did he change?

His closing statement “I’ve never seen it (the snake) since. It was a snake which was taken with its own beauty!, suggests that the snake that was within him has vanished never to be seen again.

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## **Self- Assessment Test**

### **Extract Based Questions**

**Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:**

**1. “ Some thief had removed most of my things. The room had been cleaned out! But not really, the thief had left behind one thing as a final insult!**

- (a) Who is speaking these lines?
- (b) How did the thief get his hands on the things?
- (c) What did he leave behind?
- (d) Why was no one in the house?

**2. “Phew! Each of us heaved a sigh of relief. Somebody asked, “Doctor, is your wife very fat?**

- (a) Who heaved a sigh of relief?
- (b) What were they relieved of?

(c) Who is 'doctor'?

(d) Why was such a question asked to the doctor?

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### **Short Answer Questions**

1. Write a short paragraph in your own words about the condition in which the narrator lived.
  2. Was it wrong for the narrator to "bite more than he could chew?"
  3. What did the narrator do when the snake jumped onto the table and moved towards the mirror?
  4. Describe the scene in which the snake appeared.
  5. "My companion is a thin reedy person with the gift of a sprinter. Explain your interpretation of this line.
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### **Long Answer Questions**

1. Imagine you are the snake. What is your impression of the house and the doctor?
2. In the story, the author grants the narrator a second chance. Write a different conclusion to the story, while maintaining the humour.
3. "I was but a poor, foolish and stupid doctor. Justify the statement in the light of the story, 'The Snake and the Mirror'.