

Read the short story. Then answer each question.

The Merchant's Caravan

Once there was a merchant who sold fine silks and rugs. He needed to send his goods to a country on the other side of the sandy desert.

The merchant owned a large caravan of camels, and he employed many men. Camels were the only animals strong enough to travel over the desert with the heavy loads.

For many days, the merchant and his men had been preparing for the journey. The canvas tents and the poles were placed upon one camel. Great leather bottles of water were loaded on another camel.

Firewood and bags of rice and barley meal were placed on still another. It required many camels to carry the merchant's goods.

At last the caravan was ready for the journey. The sun shone steadily, making the sand so hot that no one could walk upon it in the daytime. At night both men and camels could travel easily.

So the merchant said to the men, "Be ready to start after sunset tonight. Give the camels plenty of water to drink, and feed them well because we will have a long, hard journey."



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The merchant and his men traveled all that night. One man was the pilot. He rode ahead because he knew how to navigate by stars, and he could guide the caravan by them.

At daybreak they stopped. They spread the canvas tents and fed the camels. They built fires, cooked the rice, and made cakes of the barley meal. During the day, the men rested in the shade of the tents.

After the evening meal, the caravan started again on its way.

They had traveled like this for three long, silent nights. Early on the third morning, the camels raised their heads, stretched their nostrils, and hastened eagerly forward.

The pilot cried, "The camels smell water and grass. An oasis is near!"

Before long they could see palm trees with their spreading leaves waving in the soft breeze.

Joyfully they rested during the day. The camels drank freely from the cool spring. The men filled the great leather bottles with fresh water. In the evening, refreshed and happy, the men continued the journey.



So they traveled night after night, resting during the heat of the day. At last, one morning the pilot said, "We shall soon reach the end of our journey."

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The men were very glad to hear this because they were weary, and the camels needed rest.

After supper that night the merchant said, "Throw away the firewood and most of the water. It will lighten the burden on the camels. By tomorrow we shall reach the city."

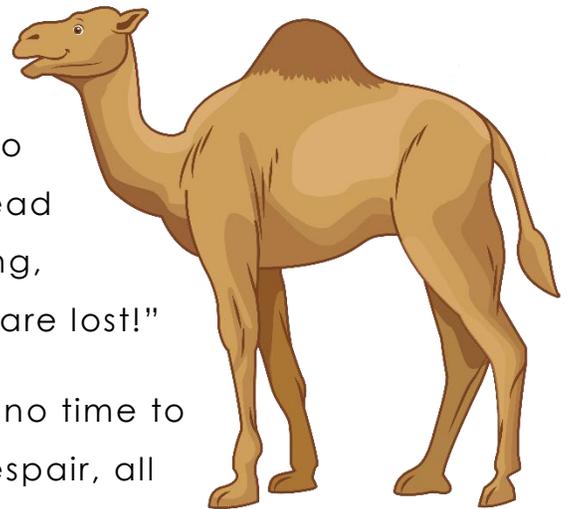
When the caravan started that evening, the pilot led the way as usual, but after a while, weary with many nights of watching, he fell asleep.

All night long the caravan traveled. At daybreak the pilot awoke and looked at the last star fading in the morning light.

"Halt!" he called. "The camels must have turned while I slept. We are at the place from which we started yesterday."

There was no water to drink. There was no firewood to cook the food. The men spread the tents and lay down under them saying, "The wood and the water are gone. We are lost!"

But the merchant said to himself, "This is no time to rest. I must find water. If I give way to despair, all will be lost."



Then the merchant started away from the tent watching the ground closely. He walked and walked. At last he saw a tuft of grass.

"There must be water somewhere under the sand, or this grass would not be here," thought the merchant.

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He ran back to the tent shouting and calling, "Bring an ax and a spade. Come quickly!"

The men jumped up and ran with the merchant to the place where the grass was growing. They began to dig in the sand, and soon they struck a rock.

The merchant jumped down into the hole and put his ear close to the rock.

"Water! Water!" he cried. "I hear water running under this great rock. We must not despair!"

Then, raising his ax above his head, he struck a heavy blow. Again and again he struck the rock.

At last the rock broke and a stream of water, clear as crystal, filled the hole almost before the merchant could jump out of it.

A shout of joy burst from the lips of the men. They drank the water eagerly, and afterwards led the camels to the spring. Then they set up a pole and fastened a flag to it so that other traders might find the well.

In the evening, the men again started on their journey, and they reached the city the very next day.



Questions:

1. Why did the caravan travel at night?

2. Why did they throw away the firewood and water?

3. How did the tuft of grass let the merchant know there was water nearby?

4. What can the merchant's actions teach us?

Answers:

1. Why did the caravan travel at night?
The caravan travelled at night because it is cooler. It is too hot to travel in the desert during the day.

2. Why did they throw away the firewood and water?
They threw away the firewood and the water because they knew they were one day away from the city and they wanted to lighten the load for the camels.

3. How did the tuft of grass let the merchant know there was water nearby?
Grass needs water to survive, so that is how the merchant knew there was water nearby.

4. What can the merchant's actions teach us?
The merchant's actions teach us not to give up.