

The Sermon at Benares

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. a. When her son dies, Kisa Gotami goes from house to house. What does she ask for? Does she get it?
- b. Kisa Gotami again goes from house to house after she speaks with the Buddha. What does she ask for then? Does she get it? Why or why not?
- c. Why was Kisa Gotami sad? What did she do in her hour of grief?

- Ans.**
- a. After the death of her only son, Kisa Gotami was overcome with grief. She carried the dead body of her son in her arms and went from door to door asking for medicine to cure her child, but nobody could provide any medicine for there is no such medicine available which can bring a dead person back to life.
 - b. Gautama Buddha asks Kisa to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death had never knocked at the door. Kisa Gotami went from door to door, but couldn't find a single house where death had not taken a beloved one away. She could not get it as death is inevitable and anyone who is born is bound to die one day.
 - c. Kisa Gotami was sad because son had died. In her hour of grief, she went from house to house in search of medicine to cure him. She had lost her senses and became selfish in wanting her son back. Then a man suggested her to go to the Buddha as he was the only one who could help her.

2. Who was Gautama Buddha? When and where was he born?

Ans. Gautama Buddha, formally named Siddhartha Gautama by his parents, was a Prince. He was born in 563 B.C - 483 B.C in North India. He had been shielded from the sufferings of the world. He attained enlightenment at the age of 32 under a fig tree and named the tree the Bodhi Tree (Tree of Wisdom) where he began to teach and to share his new understandings.

3. Mention the incident which prompted Prince Siddhartha to become a beggar.

Ans. At the age of twenty-five, he came across a sick man, an aged man, a funeral procession and a monk asking for alms. This was his first encounter with the harsh realities of life. This incident moved him so much that he became a beggar and went in search of spiritual knowledge.

4. How did Buddha teach Kisa Gotami the truth of life?

Ans. The Buddha taught Kisa Gotami the truth of life by asking her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where people had not lost a loved one to death. Kisa Gotami's futile search made her realize the truth of life, and one can attain peace only by accepting the truth.

5. What did the Buddha do after he had attained enlightenment? Why?

Ans. The Buddha saw sorrow and pain around him and left his house to seek the truth of life. After wandering for seven years, he finally sat under a fig tree and meditated until he obtained enlightenment'. After he achieved enlightenment, he renamed the tree the Bodhi Tree (Tree of Wisdom) and began to teach and to share his new understandings. At that point, he came to be known as the Buddha (the Awakened or the Enlightened).

6. Why did the Buddha choose Benares to preach his first sermon?

Ans. The Buddha chose to preach his first Sermon in Benares as the city of Benares is regarded as the

holiest of the dipping places on the River Ganges. His sermon had been preserved. It reflected the Buddha's wisdom on one inscrutable kind of suffering.

7. What did the Buddha want Kisa Gotami to understand?

Ans. The Buddha wanted Kisa Gotami to understand that death is the truth of life and is inevitable. Death is common to all and no one can avoid dying. No one can save their relatives. That's why wise people do not grieve as they know the terms of the world and have accepted reality.

8. In The Sermon at Benares, Buddha preached that death is inevitable and we need to overcome the suffering and pain that follows. How should one cope with the death of a loved one?

Ans. Losing someone or something you love or care about is very sad and painful. The more significant the loss the more grief grips us. Death is always unwelcomed. The sorrow is all the more, when death is unexpected. We still must realize that we are all mortals and death is certain. However, much one grieves and laments, one cannot bring the dead back to life. All the riches of the world cannot make dead man. So, one should accept the inevitability of the phenomenon of death. One should move forward in life and loss with strength.

9. Describe the journey of Siddhartha Gautama becoming the Buddha.

Ans. Gautam Buddha was a prince. His parents had named him Siddhartha. He had been shielded from the sufferings of the world. At the age of twenty five he saw a sick man, an aged man, a funeral procession, and a monk begging for alms. These sights moved him so much that he at once went out into the world to seek enlightenment concerning the sorrows he had witnessed. He wandered for seven years and finally sat down under a fig tree, where he received enlightenment after seven days. He renamed the tree as the Bodhi Tree (Tree of

Wisdom). He himself came to be known as the Buddha (The Awakened or the Enlightened).

The Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares, the most holy dipping places on the River Ganges. The Sermon was preserved. It reflects the Buddha's wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering.

10. Read the passage given below and answer the questions that follow:

Kisa Gotami had an only son, and he died. In her grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbours, asking them for medicine, and the people said. "She has lost her senses, The boy is dead." As last, Kisa Gotami met a man who replied to her request "I cannot give thee medicine for thy child, but I know a physician who can." And the girl said. 'Pray tell me, sir, who is it?' And the man replied, "Go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha."

- What did she do in her grief?
- Who responded to her request?
- Which word in the passage means the same as 'deep sorrow'?
- Did Buddha cure her son?

Ans. a. In grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbours.
b. An old man responded to her request.
c. The word is grief.
d. No, he didn't cure her son but made her realize that death is inevitable.

11. The Sermon at Benares could just as well be considered another Glimpses of India. If it were part of the story Glimpses of India, what ideas, values, and/or experiences would it highlight? How would you present this historical part of India?

Ans. India is a land of unity in diversity. The high mountains ranges, vast seas and countless rivers depict the diversity in unity. Each and every region of the country from Jammu and Kashmir to Kanyakumari portrays different customs and traditions. The story of Buddha, too, portrays a beautiful story of Indian history.

When Kisa Gotmi went to the Buddha for medicine to revive her son, Buddha told her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had died. Kisa became weary and hopeless after going to several houses and getting the same response. She finally grasped the Buddha's underlying meaning, then after the Buddha sermonized her that the life of the mortal in this world is troubled and painful. That the world is afflicted with death and decays, and so there is no point in grieving over something which is inescapable. He gave her examples of ripe fruits and earthen vessels whose 'lives' are short. This way he made her realign that death is unavoidable and non-even the near and dear ones-can save anyone from death.

12. Life is full of trials and tribulations. Kisa Gotami also passed through a period of grief in her life. How did she behave in those circumstances?

Ans. After the death of Kisa Gotami's only child, she became very devastated. She carried her dead child to her neighbours in order to get medicine to bring him to life. Her neighbours thought that she had gone insane as she was unable to accept the fact that her child was dead. Then, she met Gautama Buddha who gave her an exercise to do. She was asked to collect mustard seeds from a house where no one had ever died. Then, she went from one house to another but was unable to find a single house in the town where no one had died. That way, she realised that death is a part of life and anyone who is born is bound to die one day. Thus, Gautama Buddha changed her understanding of death through this exercise. Buddha told her that only the wise do not grieve, and they accept the reality of life and death.

13. What was the truth about life that Gautama Buddha explained?

Ans. In his first sermon, Gautama Buddha preached that human life was very short and was full of sorrows and pains. He cleared that our brief life was full of troubles and pains. He stated that everyone on this earth had to one day meet with death. Human beings were led to death as an ox is taken to slaughter. The world is afflicted with death and decay, therefore the wise did not grieve, as they knew the terms of the world. He said that we cannot console ourselves by weeping and grieving. He said that by following these methods our pain was greater and our body would suffer. The wise and intelligent people never wept on death and never grieved on sorrows as they knew that these were the realities and truths of our lives. Those who were born had to die certainly. As ripe fruits were early in danger of falling, so mortals, when born, were always in danger of death. As all earthen vessels made by the potter ended up being broken, the life of mortals also broke. No one could escape death. So death could not be avoided.

14. How does Buddha bring about a different perspective in Kisa Gotami's understanding of life?

Ans. Kisa Gotami was afflicted with deep sorrow and grief after losing her only child. She sought help from each of her neighbours for medication for her dead child. She had completely lost all of her senses and had forgotten that there was no cure for death. She then visited the Buddha in an effort to revive her deceased son. Buddha asked her to collect some mustard seeds from a home where no one had died. But she couldn't find one. Buddha made her realise her selfishness and that surrendering is the only way to get rid of the pain. He taught her to remain calm in suffering and see beyond personal loss. Ultimately, Kisa realised the universal nature of death and that those who can overcome sorrow are blessed and enlightened.

15. Describe the symbolism of the Bodhi Tree in Buddha's journey to enlightenment.

Ans. The Bodhi Tree symbolizes the place of enlightenment and represents wisdom and awakening. Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment under this tree, transforming it into a sacred symbol in Buddhism.

16. Discuss the metaphor of the mustard seed in Buddha's teaching to Kisa Gotami.

Ans. The mustard seed represents a common, yet profound, element of life that ties all humans together—suffering and loss. No household is free from loss, emphasizing the shared nature of human experiences and the futility of clinging to impermanent life.

17. What does the Buddha suggest as a means to achieve peace of mind in the face of inevitable death?

Ans. Buddha suggests removing the "arrow of lamentation, complaint, and grief" as the path to peace. By accepting the reality of death and suffering, one can achieve tranquility and overcome sorrow.

18. Compare and contrast the reactions of Kisa Gotami and the neighbors she approached for help.

Ans. Kisa Gotami was initially blinded by her grief, desperately seeking a cure for her dead son. In contrast, the neighbors, though sympathetic, recognized the finality of death and reflected a more resigned and understanding attitude towards the inevitability of loss.

19. Discuss the role of the monk that Siddhartha Gautama encounters during his hunt. How does this encounter impact his life choices?

Ans. The encounter with the monk, who was seeking alms and living a life of renunciation, inspired Siddhartha to consider a life dedicated to spiritual pursuits rather than worldly pleasures. This meeting was crucial in his decision to leave his princely life and seek enlightenment.

20. Analyze the emotional transformation Kisa Gotami undergoes throughout the story. How does her understanding of death and suffering evolve?

Ans. Kisa Gotami initially is overwhelmed by personal grief, unable to accept her son's death. Through Buddha's guidance, she realizes the universality of death and suffering, leading her to a deeper understanding and acceptance, which alleviates her personal sorrow.

