

## Ch 10.1 - The Sermon at Benares

### Character Sketch

#### Kisa Gautami

Kisa Gautami was grieving over the death of her son. She moved from door to door and at last came to Buddha. She made him a humble request to make her son alive. Buddha said he would do but he asked of a handful of mustard seeds. He further commanded it must be taken from a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent, or friend.

She went from house to house but was unable to find one where nobody had died. She was tired and hopeless and sat down at the wayside watching the light of the city as they flickered up. And she realised that these lives flicker up for some time and are extinguished again.

This way she was taught that the lives of mortals in this world are troubled and brief and there is no means by which none can avoid death. As all earthen vessels made by the potters are being broken, so is the life of mortals. Death is inevitable.

### Summary

This lesson is about the life of Gautam Buddha, who was born in a royal family as Siddhartha.

He was sent to study Hindu Scriptures, and later married

a princess. Once he saw a sick man, an old man, a funeral procession and a monk begging for money.

These sights moved him and he went to search for enlightenment. He started meditating under a peepal tree and got enlightened after 7 days and became known as the Buddha. He preached his first sermon at Benares.

Once a woman came to him requesting to bring her dead son to life. Gautam Buddha asked the lady to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where there had been no death.

The lady moved from one house to another but she could not find a single house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent or friend.

Then, she came to know that death is common to all and is the ultimate truth of life.

### Extract based questions

1. At about the age of twenty-five the Prince, heretofore shielded from the sufferings of the world, while out hunting chanced upon a sick man, then an aged man, then a funeral procession, and finally a monk begging for alms. These sights so moved him that he at once went out into the world to seek enlightenment concerning the sorrows he had witnessed.

- Why did Gautam Buddha go out to seek enlightenment?
- What did Gautam Buddha see while hunting?
- Find the exact word from the extract which means 'a state

of high spiritual knowledge'.

d) Describe the thought of Gautam Buddha while he encountered with the different stages of life.

A) Gautama Buddha was highly moved by seeing the suffering of man. So he went out to seek out to seek enlightenment.

b) Gautama Buddha chanced upon a sick man, then an aged man, then a funeral procession, and finally a monk begging for alms while ~~he~~ hunting.

c) 'enlightenment' from the extract means 'a state of high spiritual knowledge'.

d) Gautam Buddha was so upset and worried while encountering the different stages of life as a sickman, an aged man, a funeral and a monk begging of alms.

2. He wandered for seven years and finally sat down under a peepal tree, where he vowed to stay until enlightenment came. Enlightened after seven days, he renamed the tree the Bodhi Tree and began to teach and to share his new understanding. At that point he became known as the Buddha.

a) What was the name of the peepal tree under which Buddha sat?

b) What did Buddha do while sitting under the tree.

c) Find the exact word from the extract which means 'solemnly promise to do a specific thing'.

d) After how many days Gautam Buddha got enlightenment?

A) a) The name of the peepal tree under which Buddha sat was the Bodhi Tree.

b) Buddha began to teach and share his knowledge new understanding



while sitting under the tree.

- c) 'Vowed' from the extract means 'solemnly' promise to do a specific thing.
- d) Gautam Buddha got enlightenment after seven days of his ~~vows~~ vow that he would sit ~~under~~, until enlightenment came.

3. The Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares, most holy of the dipping places on the River Ganges; that sermon has been preserved and is given here. It reflects the Buddha's wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering.

- a) Where did Buddha preach his first Sermon?
- b) What does the sermon preached by Buddha reflect?
- c) 'Find the exact word from the extract which means impossible to understand'.
- d) How Benares is described in the lesson?

- A a) Buddha preached his first sermon at Benares.
- b) It reflects Buddha's wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering.
- c) 'Inscrutable' from the extract means 'impossible to understand'.
- d) Benares is described in the lesson as the most holy of the dipping places on the river Ganges.

### Questions and Answers.

- 1. ~~Then~~ When her son dies, Kisa Gotami goes from house to house. What does she ask for? Does she ask for? Does she get it? Why not?

A When her son dies, Kisa Goutami goes from house to house requesting for a wonder drug that could bring her son back to life. No, she could not get it because there is

no medicine that can bring a dead man back to life.

2. Kisa Gotami again goes from house to house after she speaks with the Buddha. What does she ask for, the second time around? Does she get it? Why not?

A Upon seeing the Buddha, Kisa Gotami is refilled with hope and thus, she goes again from house to house looking for mustard seeds just as Lord Buddha had asked her. Many had mustard seeds to offer but none of them could fulfill Lord Buddha's condition of having seen no deaths in the family. Therefore, she couldn't find ~~any~~ mustard seed for her son.

3. What does Kisa Gotami understand the second time? In that she failed to understand the first time? Was this what the Buddha wanted her to understand?

A When Kisa Gotami failed to find mustard seeds that could fulfill Lord Buddha's condition of having seen no deaths in the family, she became disheartened. After deep reflections, she realised that the man's fate was just like the city lights that flickered and extinguished repeatedly. The cycle of birth and death was nature's way of working. Suddenly, she became conscious as to how selfish she had been in her sorrow and that one who was born must rest eternally. Men are mortal. Yes, this is exactly what Lord Buddha wanted her to understand.

4. Why do you think Kisa Gotami understood this only the second time? In what way did the Buddha change her understanding?



A Kisa Gotami was too overwhelmed with sorrow and pain that her ability to think clearly got clouded. She couldn't release that no one can escape the cycle of death. When Kisa Gotami failed to find mustard seeds that could fulfil Lord Buddha's condition of having seen no deaths in the family, she became disheartened. After deep reflection, she made peace with the terms of the world. Lord Buddha played a major role in facilitating the shift in her understanding by teaching her a lesson that one must grieve for what is bound to happen for it will only deepen the pain and suffering.

### Long Answer Questions

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

A After the death of Kisa Gotami's only child, she became very sad. 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 his son was dead. It was then that someone suggested her to meet Gautama Buddha. When she met Gautama Buddha he gave her an exercise to do. She was asked to collect mustard seeds from a house where no one had ever died. She went from one house to another but was unable to find a single house where no one has died. This way she realised that death is a part of life and anyone who is born is bound to die one day. Thus, Buddha changed her understanding of death by this exercise, could come to terms with the truth.

2. Personal losses are a part and parcel of life. Instead of wailing on them, we should move on in life. This message of Gautama Buddha has become more relevant in modern times. Do you agree? Why / why not?

A Yes, I agree with the message that ~~the~~ Gautama Buddha has given about life. In modern times, people have a lot to explore and move with the world at the same pace. If people don't understand the practicality of life, they will be under stress which would in turn affect, their personal and professional lives. People need to ~~understand~~ understand that everyone who is born will have to die one day. There is no use being sad or crying over the loss. People should remain calm and composed in such situations. They should face the truth and move on in life.

3. What did Buddha say about death and suffering?

A After enlightenment, Buddha started to spread his teachings about life, truth and the likes of it. He told that death and suffering are the part and parcel of life. None can avoid this truth. One has to remain calm and composed so that grief doesn't overcome one. People who are wise, never complain or lament over their loss. They accept the truth and be blessed with it. So, the wisdom lies in the fact that people should not get distressed with pain, suffering and death.