

Chapter 10

The Sermon at Benares

Thinking about the Text

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

Ans.: Following the death of her son, Kisa Gotami goes from house to house to ask for medicine to bring her son back to life. She does not get it because there is no medicine to bring a dead person back.

Q.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?

Ans.: Kisa Gotami goes from house to house after speaking with Buddha. This time she asks for a handful of mustard seeds. She does not get it because the condition stated by Buddha for the choice of the house was one where nobody has ever died, which was not possible.

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

Ans.: Second time Kisa Gotami understands that death is inevitable and no one can be saved from it. She understood the temporary nature of human life. Yes it was exactly the same thing that Gautama Buddha wanted her to understand.

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

Ans.: Kisa Gotami understood the truth about death because the first time she was overwhelmed by the feeling of loss due to the death of her son. She was not able to see the bigger truth behind the actual situation. Buddha helped her in understanding by sending her house to house to find the house where nobody has ever dies. This expanded her viewpoint and she was able to see beyond her grief.

Thinking about language

Q.1 This text is written in an old fashioned style, for it reports an incident more than two millennia old. Look for the following words and phrases in the text, and try to rephrase them in more current language, based on how you understand them.

- give thee medicine for thy child.
- Pray tell me.
- Kisa repaired to the Buddha.
- there was no house but someone had died in it.
- kinsmen
- Mark!

Ans.:

They give you medicine for your child.

- Please tell me.
- Kisa went to the Buddha.
- There was no house in which 'someone had not died.
- relatives
- Listen! / look!

Q.2 You know that we can combine sentences using words like and, or, but, yet and then. But sometimes no such word seems appropriate. In such a case we can use a semicolon (;) or a dash (-) to combine two clauses. She has no interest in music; I doubt she will become a singer like her mother.

The second clause here gives speaker's opinion on the first clause.

Here is a sentence from the text that uses semicolons to combine clauses. Break up the sentence into three simple sentences. Can you then say which has a better rhythm when you read it, the single sentence using semicolons, or the three simple sentences?

For there is not any means by which those who have been born can avoid dying; after reaching old age there is death; of such a nature are living beings.

Ans.:

- (i) For there is not any means by which those who have been born can avoid dying.
- (ii) After reaching old age there is death.
- (iii) Such is the nature of living beings.

In my opinion, the three simple sentences have better rhythm.

Writing

Q.1 Write a page (about three paragraphs) on one of the following topics. You can think about the ideas in the text that are relevant to these topics, and add your own ideas and experiences to them.

1. Teaching someone to understand a new or difficult idea
2. Helping each other to get over difficult times
3. Thinking about oneself as unique, or as one among billions of others.

Ans.:

Teaching someone to understand a new or difficult idea

We know that to teach someone is difficult because the perspective and understanding of each individual is different and for teaching one needs to understand the psyche and mindset. It is generally seen that once a person starts following a path, every suggestion that goes against that established belief is considered unwelcomed. This makes the situation all the more difficult.

It takes a whole new level of wisdom and patience to help someone understand your own viewpoint. At the time when a person is going through a period of grief or mental turmoil, they find understanding the bigger picture all the more irrelevant. Thus, only a wise and patient person can teach the tensed individual any new idea.

Helping each other to get over difficult times

When an individual of a community is going through hard times, it becomes the responsibility of all the other community members to try to bring peace to the tensed individual. It is a harsh reality that problems are a part and parcel of the life and it is impossible to bypass them at all times, but the support of others makes it easier to handle.

At the times when someone is grieving the loss of a loved one, then the moral support and consoling from the fellow community members makes it relatively easier to get that phase of mental and emotional stress.

Thinking about oneself as unique or as one among billions of others

Humans tend to be selfish in the short term and it is a well known characteristic trait. We tend to consider our sorrows, our own troubles a

pedestal up than others. This idea is because of our understanding that our personal problems are exclusive and hence nobody else has gone through that level of suffering.

This is the basic reason behind the grief that one faces at certain instances. It becomes hard for anyone to see past that grief at that time. If a person is able to see the bigger picture and understand the harsh reality that nothing is exclusive in this world then the amount of grief and the degree of suffering can be drastically cut down.

For Anne Gregory - Thinking about the Poem

Q.1 What does the young man mean by "great honey coloured/Ramparts at your ear?" Why does he say the young men are "thrown into despair" by them?

Ans.: "By the honey-coloured ramparts", the young man means the golden coloured hair locks of his lover that hung around her ears. By "thrown into despair", the poet means that the hairs were so attractive that young men gained a strong desire to love her. They loved her for her beautiful hair and not for what she actually was as a person.

Q.2 What colour is the women's hair? What does she say she can change it to? Why would she want to do so?

Ans.: The colour of young woman's hair is grey and yellow like gold. She wished that her hairs changed to brown or black instead of golden because she wanted her lover to love her for her personality not because of her golden hair.

Q.3 Objects have qualities which make them desirable to others. Can you think of some objects (a car, a phone, a dress) and say what qualities make one object more desirable than other? Imagine you were trying to sell an object: what qualities would you emphasise?

Ans.: The physical and utility qualities of objects make them desirable as people tend to get attracted to these qualities.

When choosing a car, we are generally affected by the way it looks and the style it imparts to the riders. Only after looking at the physical traits we shift to other traits like utility and specifications.

If I would be willing to sell an object then I would like to emphasize on the utility and the performance traits of it. This is so because the physical characteristics tend to wither over time and lose their sheen but favourable utility characteristics will remain with the object for far long.

Q.5 What about people? Do we love others because we like their qualities, whether physical or mental? Or is it possible to love someone “for themselves alone”? Are some people ‘more lovable’ than others? Discuss this question in pairs or in groups, considering points like the following:

- (i) a parent or caregiver's love for a newborn baby, for a mentally or physically challenged child; for a clever child or a prodigy?
- (ii) the public’s love for a film star, a sportsperson, a politician, or a social worker.
- (iii) your love for a friend, or brother or sister.
- (iv) your love for a pet, and the pet’s love for you.

Ans.:

There is no denying the fact that the liking of an individual is highly dependent on the physical appearance and mental maturity shown at the times of interaction. Indeed some people are more lovable, but this choice

depends on the individual preferences and there is no hard lined rule for this.

(i) A parent's love for a newborn baby or a mentally or physically challenged child depends only on the emotional connect and the feeling of belongingness. A parent will like the child irrespective of the mental and physical abilities but in practical terms cleverness of the child is the next benchmark for the liking.

(ii) The public's love for a film star, a sports person, a politician, a film star or sports person is based on his/her performance in the respective genre. This means that this love will eventually wither if these individuals fail to deliver on their respective jobs.

(iii) The love for siblings is basically an emotional connect. There is hardly any materialistic stance to this emotional attachment and therefore this love will remain unchanged even in the face of most difficult situations.

(iv) Love for the pets and vice versa is dependent on the compatibility between the two parties at a given instant. This means that the degree of belongingness and emotional connect can vary over time.

Q.5 You have perhaps concluded that people are not objects to be valued for their qualities or riches rather that for themselves. But elsewhere Yeats asks the questions: How can we separate the dancer from the dance? Is it possible to separate 'the person himself or herself' from how the person looks, sounds, walks and so on? Think of how you or a friend or member of your family has changed over the years. Has your relationship also changed? In what way?

Ans.:

The general idea of liking is based on the fact that every person has some basic characteristics that make them likable. These traits can be physical, mental or some vocational abilities.

It is obviously difficult to see someone beyond their traits, but once someone develops a level of liking for the person, it hardly matters whether the abilities remain the same or change. At personal interaction level, it is possible to make the distinction between the characteristics and the personality of the people.

There were many friends in school but over the time this number got on reducing as new people started to come in everyone's lives. One of the friends of that time is still with me; his nature, preferences, likings and the stance towards the life has changed a lot and obviously it has affected our relationship dynamics in one way or another but the level of belongingness and attachment remains constant. This shows that even in the light of changes, strong relationships remain intact.