

Sermon at Benares

Summary: This story is about a woman who is very sad at untimely demise of her son. This is quite natural for anybody. Over a period of time, people usually come to terms with personal tragedies and move on in life. The main character in this story is running from pillar to post so that someone could somehow revive her dead child. But nobody can do miracle and hence everyone refuses to come to her help. Finally, a person sends her to Buddha because he was aware that Buddha would surely help that poor woman to come to terms with her grief. Buddha finds an innovative approach to make that lady realize the imminent truth of death. On Buddha's command, Kisa Gotami goes in search of a house where nobody had ever died. But since it is impossible to find such a house, she does not get what she was searching for. Finally, the poor lady realizes the important lesson which Buddha wanted to teach her.

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

Answer: Kisa Gotami goes from house to house to get some medicine which could put back life in her dead son. But once a person is dead, he cannot be revived. Hence, people only pity at her agony because they know that no medicine can bring life back in her child.

Question 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?

Answer: After speaking with the Buddha, Kisa Gotami goes from house to house to get a handful of mustard seeds. But Buddha had made a condition, i.e. mustard seeds should be only from a house in which nobody ever died. Since death is an imminent fact and is integral to the life cycle, so Kisa Gotamy does not get mustard seeds.

Question 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?

Answer: She understood the real truth of life and death. She understood that everyone who has come into this world is going to die sooner or

later. By sending her to different houses, Buddha wanted her to realize the fragile nature of human life. He also wanted her to rise above worldly matters so that the departed soul could rest in peace.

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

Answer: Buddha applied practical way of teaching an important lesson. Sometimes, we may not understand a complex subject by only reading a text material. Many a time, we need to have practical experience to understand complex issues.

Question 5: How do you usually understand the idea of ‘selfishness’? Do you agree with Kisa Gotami that she was being ‘selfish in her grief’?

Answer: Being concerned with your own desires and beliefs is called selfishness. Kisa Gotami was only thinking about her personal sorrow and life after her personal tragedy. She was not thinking about grief of all other people. So, it can be said that she was being ‘selfish in her grief’.