

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 10: THE SARMON AT BENARES



THE SARMON AT BENARES

~Summary~

-by Betty Renshaw

Buddha as a Prince

Gautama Buddha was born as a prince named Siddhartha Gautama in Northern India. At twelve, he was sent for schooling in Hindu sacred scriptures. Four years later, he returned home and got married to a princess. They had a son. They lived a royal life for ten years.

Gautama Feels Sufferings of the World

He was protected from the sufferings of the world. One day, he saw a sick man, an old man, a funeral procession and a monk begging for money and food. This moved Buddha and he then went out to seek enlightenment.

Gautama Seeks Enlightenment

He travelled aimlessly for seven years and then he stayed under a peepal tree until he attained enlightenment. After seven days, he got enlightened and renamed the tree as Bodhi Tree (Tree of Wisdom). There, he began to teach and share his knowledge and became known as Buddha.

Buddha Gives his First Sermon

Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares. It is the holiest of the dipping places on the river Ganges. This sermon reflects Buddha's wisdom about the kind of suffering that is impossible to interpret.

Kisa Gotami's Story

Kisa Gotami had only one son who had died. She carried her dead son in her arms and went door to door asking for medicines for her dead child. The neighbours pitied her but could not help her as her son was dead. They were as helpless as Kisa and couldn't go against the will of God. Finally, somebody suggested that she should go to the Sakyamuni, the Buddha. Kisa Gotami went to meet Gautama Buddha. Gautama told her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death had never knocked at the door. Kisa thought that it was a very easy task. She went

to all the houses in the village but couldn't find a single house where death had not taken a beloved away.

She sat down, hopeless and tired. She soon realised that she was being very selfish in her grief. Death is common to all.

Buddha's Reply to Kisa Gotami

The life of morals is troubled, brief and combined with pain. It is not possible to avoid death. As the ripe fruits are in danger of falling, as the earthen vessels made by the potter break, similarly the mortals have the danger of death. Wise men and fools, all fall in the power of death. Only the wise do not grieve and they accept the reality. All weeping and grieving will bring more pain and sufferings to the body. One, who is composed, will obtain peace of mind and will be free from sorrow and be blessed.

Conclusion of The Sermon at Benares

The chapter – The Sermon at Benares explains one of the holiest preachings of Lord Buddha that ended the suffering of a grieving mother, Kisa Gotami who lost her son. By accepting the truth of life, she freed herself from unending pain.

NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 135)

(THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT)

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 was overcome with grief and agony when her only son died. She carried her son's dead body in her arms and went from one house to another asking for medicine that could cure her child, but nobody could help. Since her son was dead, it wasn't possible for anyone to give her any medicine and bring the dead person back to life.

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: Gautama Buddha asked Kisa Gotami to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent or friend. She went from door to door, but couldn't find a single house where death had not knocked their door and taken away their beloved one. Hence, she did not get any such house as death is inevitable and all mortals who come to this world are bound to die someday.

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: When Kisa Gotami failed to procure a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death never took away any beloved one, she became weary and helpless and sat down by the roadside. While sitting there, she observed the flickering and extinguishing of lights and finally the darkness of the night reigned everywhere. This incident made her realise that death is inevitable and she was being selfish in her grief and agony. She understood that in this valley of desolation, there is always a path that leads man, who has surrendered all his selfishness, to immortality.

Yes, this is what Buddha wanted her to understand that every mortal being who is born in this world is bound to die one day.

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

Answer: In the first instance, Kisa Gotami could only see her grief of losing her young son. But, when she went from one house to another the second time to procure a handful of mustard seeds to save her dead son, she understood that everyone was dealing with the loss of a dear one. Not a single house was left untouched by death, where people had not lost their son,

husband, parent or friend. At some point of time, everyone had experienced the pain of death and losing their loved ones. Feeling dejected, she sat down and realised that death is inevitable and the fate of mortal beings is to live and die someday. Through this instance, Gautama Buddha helped her to understand that death is common to all mortal beings and everyone is bound to die one day or the other.

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: A selfish person is one who is extremely preoccupied about himself or herself. In the story, Kisa Gotami was also being selfish in her grief because she was just thinking about her own pain. So when she lost her child, she wanted to bring him back to life by any means and finally went to Buddha to ask for help. He gave her the ultimate lesson of life that humans are mortal beings and it is natural for everyone to die. Although we may find it difficult to accept the death of our loved ones, death is inevitable and is bound to happen sooner or later.

Questions (Page No. 136)

(THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT)

Question I: 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!

Answer:

- Give you medicine for your child
- Please tell me
- Kisa went to the Buddha
- There was not a single house where no one had died
- Relatives
- Listen

Question II: 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 the 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.

Answer: The single sentence using semicolons has a better cadence and rhythm. This implies that the three parts of the sentence are connected to each other in their meanings. The second clause gives a detailed information of the first clause. The third clause is therefore, directly related to both the first and the second clause. Their meanings are conveyed in a better way when they are joined by semicolons.

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