

Chapter 10: The Sermon at Benares**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:

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.

Question: 2

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

Answer:

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 away. She could not get it as death is inevitable and anyone who is born is bound to die one day.

Question: 3

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

Answer:

After failing to procure a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death had never knocked at the door, she sat down by the roadside feeling helpless. She saw the lights of the city that flickered and were extinguished. At last, it was darkness everywhere.

She realised that death was common to all and she was being selfish in her grief. Yes, this is what Buddha wanted her to understand, that everyone who is born has to die one day.

Question: 4

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

Answer:

Earlier, she could see only her grief. When she went from door to door the second time, she understood that everyone was dealing with the loss of a beloved one. There was not a single house in the town, where death had not taken a father, a mother, a sister, a brother, son or a daughter. Everyone, at some point or the other, have experienced the death of their loved ones. Gautama Buddha helped her to understand all this, as he told her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death had never knocked at the door. This way she got aware that death is common to all human beings.

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 only thinks about himself or herself, and to some extent Kisa Gotami was being selfish because we are humans and it is natural for us to die. We do not easily accept the death of our loved ones. Same has happened with Kisa Gotami. As it was her only child, she did not want him to die finally went to Buddha to ask for help.

Thinking about the Language

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! II.

Answer:

- give you medicine for your child
- Please tell me
- Kisa went to the Buddha
- there was no house where no one had died
- relatives
- Listen!

II. You know that we can combine sentences using words like **and**, **or**, **but**, **yet** and **then**. **But**

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.

Upon breaking this into three simple sentences:

Sentence 1: For there is not any means by which those who have been born can avoid dying.

Sentence 2: After reaching old age there is death.

Sentence 3: Of such a nature are living beings.

The single sentence using semicolons has a better pace because the three parts of the sentence are connected to each other in their meanings and are conveyed in a better way when they are joined by semicolons.

Writing

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

Answer: to be self attempted