

The Sermon at Benares

Gautama Buddha a Prince

Gautama Buddha (563 B.C.-483 B.C.) was a prince. His name was Siddhartha Gautama. At twelve he was sent away for schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures. He returned after four years. He married a princess. They had a son.

World sufferings make Gautama a beggar for enlightenment

Gautama Buddha had been shielded from the sufferings of the world. When he was twenty-five, he saw a sick man. Then he saw an aged man, then a funeral procession. Finally, he saw a monk begging for alms. These made him so sad that he himself became a beggar. Then he went out to seek spiritual knowledge.

Gautama Buddha gets spiritual knowledge

Gautama Buddha wandered for seven years. Finally he sat down under a fig tree. He vowed to stay until spiritual knowledge came to him. He got it after seven days. He named the tree as the 'Tree of Wisdom'. He began to teach. Soon he became known as the Buddha.

Buddha's first Sermon

The Buddha preached his first sermon at Benares. It is the most holy of the places on the Ganges. The sermon has ten important points. This shows Buddha's wisdom about the suffering. These are given below :

1. Kisa Gotami had an only son. He died. She took the dead child to her neighbours to make him alive. She asked for medicine. The people called her mad.
2. At last Kisa met a man. He told her that he had no medicine. But he knew a physician who could give medicine for the same.
3. Kisa Gotami asked him to tell the man. He told her to go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha.
4. Kisa told the Buddha to give medicine to cure the boy.
5. The Buddha told her to bring him a handful of mustard seed. It must be from a house where no one has died.
6. Kisa Gotami went from house to house. People gave her mustard-seed. She asked if no one died in the house. They told her not to remind them of the deepest grief.
7. Kisa Gotami could not get the seed from such a house. At last, she sat tired and hopeless at the wayside. Darkness soon fell. She saw the lights of the city. Soon the darkness of the night was everywhere. She considered the fate of men. She thought that she was really selfish in her grief. Death was common to all. Yet there lay a path. That led man to immortality if he surrendered all selfishness.
8. The Buddha told her that human life was brief and painful. No one could avoid dying. All those who were born were to die one day. Young and adult all have to die like the vessels of a potter. They break after being made.
9. All depart from life. A father cannot save his son. All relatives lament deeply when the dead is taken like an ox for slaughter. So the world is affected by suffering due to death and decay. The wise do not grieve as they know the truth.
10. No one will get peace of mind from weeping or from grieving. On the contrary his pain will be greater. His body will suffer. The dead are not saved by expressing sorrow. He who is off the

lamentation and grief shall have peace of mind. One who has overcome sorrow will be free from sorrow and be blessed.

NCERT Solutions

Thinking About the Text (Page 135)

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.

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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.

Extra Questions

Very Short Answer Type

Question 1.

What was the original name of the Buddha?

Answer:

The original name of the Buddha was Siddhartha Gautama.

Question 2.

What did Siddhartha study in school?

Answer:

Siddhartha was sent away to school to study the sacred Hindu scriptures.

Question 3.

What did Siddhartha see at the age of twenty-five?

Answer:

At the age of twenty-five, he saw a sickman, an aged man, a funeral procession and a monk begging.

Question 4.

Where did Siddhartha get enlightened?

Answer:

Siddhartha got enlightened under a peepal tree after seven days.

Question 5.

Why was the tree renamed as 'Bodhi Tree'?

Answer:

The Buddha got wisdom under the tree. So it was renamed 'Bodhi tree'.

Question 6.

What was the problem of Gotami?

Answer:

Gotami's son had died. She wanted him to live again.

Question 7.

What did she see in the city?

Answer:

She watched the light of the city.

Question 8.

What did she learn from the flickering of lights?

Answer:

She learnt that the fate of men is just like the city lights that flickered and extinguished again and again.

Question 9.

Who is being addressed by the Buddha?

Answer:

The people of Benares were being addressed by the Buddha.

Question 10.

What did he say about life of mortals?

Answer:

Buddha said that all mortals have to die.

Question 11.

What is inevitable?

Answer:

Death is inevitable.

Question 12.

What have the life and death of the man been compared to?

Answer:

The life and death are being seen and compared with the ripe fruits which have to fall.

Short Answer Type

Question 1.

How did Gautama come to be known as the Buddha?

Answer:

Siddhartha Gautama wandered for seven years and finally sat down under a Peepal tree till he got enlightenment. After seven days of enlightenment, he renamed the 'Bodhi Tree' and began to teach and to share his new understanding and came to be known as the Buddha.

Question 2.

Why did prince Siddhartha leave the palace and became a beggar?

Answer:

While out hunting prince Siddhartha chanced upon a sick man, an aged man and then a funeral procession and he also saw a monk begging. He realised that world is full of sorrow so he left the palace in the search of enlightenment.

Question 3.

How did Buddha get enlightenment?

Answer:

Siddhartha Gautama wandered for seven years and finally sat down under a Peepal tree till he got enlightenment. After seven days of enlightenment, he renamed the 'Bodhi Tree' and began to teach and to share his new understanding and came to be known as the Buddha.

Question 4.

Why did the Buddha choose Benares to preach his first sermon?

Answer:

The Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares. This city is regarded as the most holy of the dipping places of the River Ganga. That sermon has been preserved. It reflects the Buddha's wisdom about one kind of suffering which cannot be understood.

Question 5.

What did Kisa Gotami say to Buddha? What reply did he give to her?

Answer:

Kisa Gotami went to the Buddha and asked him to give her the medicine to make her son alive. The Buddha asked her to bring him a handful of mustard seed. It should be brought from a house where no one had died.

Question 6.

Why was Kisa Gotami sad? What did she do in her grief?

Answer:

Kisa Gotami's only son died and she was full of grief. She carried the dead son to all her neighbours. She asked them for medicine so that her son can be alive again. The people remarked that she had lost her senses.

Question 7.

What did Kisa Gotami do after the Buddha had asked her for a handful of mustard seed?

Answer:

Kisa Gotami went from house to house to get a handful of mustard seed. People gave her the mustard seed. But when she asked if anyone had died in their family, they regretfully told her that the livings were few, but the deads were many. Kisa Gotami found no house where someone had not died.

Question 8.

What did the Buddha want to explain to Kisa Gotami?

Answer:

The Buddha wanted to explain to Kisa Gotami that man cannot get peace of mind by grieving. On the contrary, his pain will be greater and his body will suffer. He will make himself sick and pale. A man who overcomes all sorrows will be free from sorrow and will be blessed.

Question 9.

Why did Kisa Gotami go from house to house?

Answer:

Kisa Gotami was a lady who lived in Benares. Her only son had died and she could not bear it. She went from house to house to cure his dead son. Someone told her about the Buddha and she reached him to cure his dead son.

Question 10.

What was the basic idea of the Buddha's preaching?

Answer:

The basic idea of the Buddha's preaching was that death is the ultimate truth of life. It is that every living being has to die one day. No one can escape from death. Grief cannot console anyone. We must accept this universal truth.

Long Answer Type

Question 1.

What is the nature of the life of the human beings according to the Buddha?

Answer:

The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief. It is combined with pain. Nobody can avoid dying. After reaching old age, there is death. Such is the nature of human beings. Just as ripe fruits are in danger of falling; so mortals are in danger of death. As all earthen vessels after a certain period of time break, so is the life of mortals. All have to die. Only he can get peace of mind who does not lament, complain and grieve. He who has overcome sorrow will be free from sorrow, and be blessed.

Question 2.

How did Gautam Buddha get enlightenment? Explain with reference to the story.

Answer:

Siddhartha Gautama was a prince who was protected from the sufferings of the world. At the age of twenty-five, he came across a sick man, an aged man, a funeral procession and a monk begging for alms. These sights moved him so much that he went out into the world to seek enlightenment concerning the sorrows he had witnessed. Siddhartha wandered for seven years and finally sat down under a Peepal tree.

He vowed to stay there until enlightenment came. Being enlightened after seven days, he renamed the tree the Bodhi Tree, the Tree of Wisdom. Thereafter he began to teach and share his new understanding. At that point he became to be known as the Buddha. He preached his first sermon at the holy city of Benares.

Question 3.

Why and how did Siddhartha Gautama become the Buddha?

Answer:

Gautama Buddha was born as a prince named Siddhartha Gautama in northern India. At the age of twelve, he was sent away for learning the Hindu sacred scriptures. Four years later he returned home to marry a princess. They had a son and lived for ten years as befitted royalty. Upto the age of twenty-five, the prince was shielded from the sufferings of the world.

Then while going out for hunting, he came across by chance a sick man, an aged man, a funeral procession, and finally a monk begging for alms. These sights moved the prince so much that he went out into the world to seek a state of high spiritual knowledge concerning the sorrows of human beings. He wandered for seven years and finally sat down under a peepal tree. He got enlightenment after seven days. After that he came to be known as the Buddha.

Question 4.

How did Buddha make Kisa Gotami understand about the reality of death?

OR

What lesson on death and suffering did the Buddha teach Gotami in the chapter. 'The Sermon at Benaras'.

Answer:

Kisa Gotami's only son had died. In her grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbours, asking them for medicine. Then a man suggested her to go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha. Kisa Gotami requested Gautama Buddha to give her the medicine that would cure her son.

The Buddha replied that he wanted a handful of mustard-seed which must be taken from a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent or friend. Kisa Gotami went from house to house. People pitied her but she could not find any house where near and dear one had not died. She thought how selfish she had been in her grief. She realised that death is common to all human beings.

Question 5.

"The World is afflicted with death and decay, therefore the wise do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world". Explain with reference to the story "The Sermon at Benares".

Answer:

According to Gautama Buddha, the world is affected by sufferings, disease or pain, death and decay. Therefore, the wise persons do not mourn, knowing the terms of the world. Nobody can get peace of mind from weeping or mourning. Rather his pain will be greater and his body will suffer. He will make himself sick and pale, yet the dead cannot be saved from his expression of sorrow. He who seeks peace should "draw out the arrow" of lamentation, complaint and grief. In this manner, she who has become composed will obtain peace of mind. He who has overcome all sorrow will become free from sorrow, and be blessed.

Question 6.

In 'The Sermon at Benares', the Buddha preached that death is inevitable and we need to overcome the suffering and pain that follows. Discuss.

Answer:

It is very painful to lose someone or something we love. When we lose someone it is a great emotional suffering. The more we grieve over death, the more painful it will be for us. Death is always

unwelcome. We must realize that we are all mortals and death is common to all. We may lament and cry but we cannot bring dead back to life. All the riches of the world cannot bring life back. We must realize that death is common to all rich or poor. Those who have overcome sorrow will become free from sorrow and are blessed.

Reference to Context

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow:

Question 1.

Gautama Buddha (563 B.C – 483 B.C.) began life as a prince named Siddhartha Gautama, in northern India. At twelve, he was sent away for schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures and four years later he returned home to marry a princess. They had a son and lived for ten years as befitted royalty. At about the age of twenty-five, the Prince, heretofore shielded from the sufferings of the world, while out hunting chanced upon a sick him, 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.

- (i) How did Gautam Buddha begin his life?
- (ii) For how long did he live as a prince?
- (iii) How did it change his life?
- (iv) Pick out the word from the passage that means same as—‘a person who belongs to the family of a king or queen’.

Answer:

- (i) Gautam Buddha began his life as a prince, named Siddhartha Gautama.
- (ii) He lived as a prince for about twenty five years.
- (iii) He was moved deeply by the sorrow he had witnessed. He at once became a beggar and went out into the world to seek enlightenment.
- (iv) ‘royal’.

Question 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 (Tree of Wisdom) and began to teach and to share his new understandings. At that point he became known as the Buddha (the Awakened or the Enlightened). 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.

- (i) Why did he wander?
- (ii) Where did he get enlightened?
- (iii) Why was the tree renamed as “Bodhi Tree”?
- (iv) Pick out the word from the passage that means the same as—“religious talk”.

Answer:

- (i) He wandered for seven years in search of knowledge.
- (ii) He got enlightened after seven days under a fig peepal.
- (iii) The tree was renamed ‘Bodhi Tree’. ‘Bodhi tree’ stands for the tree of wisdom. The Buddha got wisdom under that tree.
- (iv) ‘sermon’.

Question 3.

Kisa Gotami had an only son, and he died. In her grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbours, asking them for medicine, and the people said, "She has lost her senses. The boy is dead." At length, Kisa Gotami met a man who replied to her request, "I cannot give thee medicine for thy child, but I know a physician who can." And the girl said, "Pray tell me, sir; who is it?" And the man replied, "Go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha." Kisa Gotami repaired to the Buddha and cried, "Lord and Master, give me the medicine that will cure my boy." The Buddha answered, "I want a handful of mustard-seed." And when the girl in her joy promised to procure it, the Buddha added. "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent or friend."

- (i) What had happened to Kisa Gotami?
- (ii) What did the people remark?
- (iii) What did Buddha ask the girl for?
- (iv) Pick out the word from the passage that means the same as—'went to'.

Answer:

- (i) Kisa Gotami was grieved at the death of her only son.
- (ii) The people remarked that she had lost her senses.
- (iii) The Buddha asked the girl to procure mustard seed from a house where no one had died before.
- (iv) 'repaired'.

Question 4.

Poor Kisa Gotami now went from house to house, and the people pitied her and said, "Here is mustard-seed; take it!" But when she asked, "Did a son or daughter, a father or mother, die in your family?" they answered her, "Alas! the living are few, but the dead are many. Do not remind us of our deepest grief." And there was no hope but some beloved one had died in it.

- (i) Why did Kisa Gotami go from house to house?
- (ii) What response did she get?
- (iii) Pick out the word from the passage that means same as—"pain".
- (iv) Was Kisa Gotami able to bring mustard-seed from any house?

Answer:

- (i) Kisa Gotami went from house to house to get the mustard seeds.
- (ii) She got the negative response about the mustard seeds. She couldn't find a house where no one had died.
- (iii) 'grief'.
- (iv) No, she could not bring mustard-seed.

Question 5.

Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless, and sat down at the wayside watching the lights of the city, as they flickered up and were extinguished again. At last the darkness of the night reigned everywhere. And she considered the fate of men, that their lives flicker up and are extinguished again. And she thought to herself, "How selfish am I in my grief! Death is common to all; yet in this valley of desolation there is a path that leads him to immortality who has surrendered all selfishness."

- (i) Why was Kisa Gotami hopeless?
- (ii) Why did she sit down at the wayside?
- (iii) What did she see in the city?
- (iv) Pick out the word from the passage that means the same as—an area which is filled with deep sorrow'.

Answer:

- (i) Kisa Gotami was hopeless because the Buddha asked her to bring mustard-seed from a house where nobody had died before.

- (ii) She sat down at the wayside because she had become weary and hopeless.
- (iii) She watched the light of the city. The lights flickered up and extinguished again and again.
- (iv) "valley of desolation".

Question 6.

The Buddha said, "The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain. For there is not any means by which those that have been born can avoid dying; after reaching old age there is death; of such a nature are living beings. As ripe fruits are early in danger of falling, so mortals when born are always in danger of death. As all earthen vessels made by the potter end in being broken, so is the life of mortals. Both young and adult, both those who are fools and those who are wise, all fall into the power of death; all are subject to death. (Pages 134-135)

- (i) What did the Buddha say about the life of mortals?
- (ii) What cannot be avoided by those that have been born?
- (iii) What is inevitable?
- (iv) Find the word from the passage that means the same as—"those bound to die".

Answer:

- (i) The Buddha said that the life of mortals in this world is short, full of troubles and combined with pain.
- (ii) Death cannot be avoided by those who have been born.
- (iii) Death is inevitable.
- (iv) 'mortals'.

Question 7.

"Of those who, overcome by death, depart from life, a father cannot save his son, nor kinsmen their relations. Mark! while relatives are looking on and lamenting deeply, one by one mortals are carried off, like an ox that is led to the slaughter. So the world is afflicted with death and decay, therefore the wise do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world.

- (i) Why did the Buddha give this sermon to Kisa Gotami?
- (ii) What is the fate of mortals in the world?
- (iii) Why do the wise men not grieve?
- (iv) Pick out the word from the passage that means the same as—"the killing of animals for their meat".

Answer:

- (i) The Buddha gave this sermon to Kisa Gotami to console her because her son had died.
- (ii) Mortals are carried off like an ox that is led to the slaughter.
- (iii) Due to knowing the terms of the world, the wise men do not grieve.
- (iv) 'slaughter'.

Question 8.

"Not from weeping not from grieving will anyone obtain peace of mind; on the contrary, his pain will be the greater and his body will suffer. He will make himself sick and pale, yet the dead are not saved by his lamentation. He who seeks peace should draw out the arrow of lamentation, and complaint, and grief. He who has drawn out the arrow and has become composed will obtain peace of mind; he who has overcome all sorrow will become free from sorrow, and be blessed."

- (i) Who is the speaker in the above passage?
- (ii) How does 'weeping' affect a person?
- (iii) What should one do to obtain peace?
- (iv) Pick out the word from the passage that means same as—"expression of sorrow".

Answer:

- (i) The Buddha is the speaker in the above passage.
- (ii) Weeping and grieving cause pain and suffering. A person who weeps does not obtain peace.
- (iii) One should never lament, complain and indulge in grief to obtain peace of mind.
- (iv) lamentation.