

First Flight Chapter 10 The Sermon at Benaras

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: When her beloved son passed away, Kisa Gotami was overtaken with grief and agony. She travelled from home to house asking for medicine that could heal her son while carrying his lifeless body in her arms, but no one could assist her. Nobody could administer her medication and revive the deceased as her son had already passed away.

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: Kisa Gotami was instructed by Gautama Buddha to bring some mustard seeds from a home where no one had ever lost a parent, spouse, kid, or friend. She knocked on doors in search of homes where death had not already knocked and snatched away a loved one, but she was unable to discover a single one. She therefore did not receive such a home because everyone who enters this world as a mortal is destined to die at some point.

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: Kisa Gotami got exhausted and powerless when she was unable to retrieve a handful of mustard seeds from a home where no one had ever lost a loved one, so she sat down by the roadside. As she sat there, she watched as lights started to dim and eventually go out, leaving everything in pitch blackness. She learned through this experience that death is inevitable and that she was being selfish in her anguish and sadness. She realised there was always a way out of this desolate valley that would lead a man who had given up all selfishness to immortality.

Yes, this is what Buddha wanted her to understand that every human 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: Kisa Gotami could initially only perceive her sorrow over losing her small son. She realised that everyone was grieving the death of a loved one as she went from home to house a second time to collect a few mustard seeds to revive her dead son. There was not a single home where someone had not lost a son, husband, parent, or friend. Everyone has gone through the agony of dying and losing a loved one at some point. Dejected, she sat down and realised that death was inescapable and that all mortals will eventually live and pass away.

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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: An individual who is overly self-focused is considered selfish. In the narrative, Kisa Gotami, who was only considering her own suffering, was likewise being self-centered in her mourning. After losing her child, she sought to revive him in whatever way possible and eventually turned to Buddha for assistance. He taught her the most important lesson in life—that people are mortal, and that it is only normal for them to pass away. Although it may be tough for us to accept the passing of a loved one, it is unavoidable and will occur sooner or later.