

## THE SERMON AT BENARES

The Sermon at Benares illustrates the valuable preaching of Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha was born as a prince named Siddhārtha Gautama in North India. When he was twelve years old, he was sent away from home to study the sacred Hindu scriptures. He returned four years later and married a beautiful princess. They had a healthy son and led a life of royalty for ten years. Being a part of the royal family, he was protected from the sufferings and unpleasant happenings around the world.

One fine day while he went out hunting, the prince met an ailing man, an old man, a funeral procession and a monk begging for alms. He was moved by the encounters and soon he left royalty behind to seek enlightenment for all the sorrows that he witnessed. After seven years, he attained Salvation and sat under a tree and renamed it as the 'Bodhi Tree' (Tree of Wisdom) and began preaching and sharing his new understandings. Soon, he came to be known as

the Buddha (the Awakened or the Enlightened). He gave his first sermon in Benares, the holy city on the banks of the river Ganges. In one of his sermons, he taught about a lady, KisaGotami whose only son had died. She was devastated and in extreme grief for the sudden loss. She went from one house to another seeking help and medicine to bring her son back to life. People thought that she had lost her mind, owing to her grief.

One day, she met a man who directed her to approach Lord Buddha for guidance. He felt that Lord Buddha could possibly help her in this crisis. The lady approached the monk as directed and begged him to cure her son. Lord Buddha asked her to procure mustard seeds from a house where the family had never lost a family member, relative or friend. KisaGotami was filled with a ray of hope and immediately went in search of it from one house to another, but she could find none. She felt disheartened and finally realised how selfish she had been in desperately searching for something that was not possible to

achieve. Thus, she understood that man is a mortal being, all who come to Earth, have to leave behind all their relations and belongings when they die. This was the lesson that Lord Buddha taught her and wanted her to understand, that life and death is the cycle of the universe and no one can escape it.

Lord Buddha taught a valuable lesson to all that feelings of sorrow and grief only escalates man's suffering and pain. It deteriorates one's health and worsens the current situation. Therefore, a wise person is one who is completely aware how Mother Nature functions and must not lose hope or remain in constant grief for something that is bound to happen. It is only then one can enjoy life and stay happy and blessed in life.

### **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, KisaGotami who lost her son. By accepting the

truth of life, she freed herself from unending pain.

## QUESTION ANSWERS

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

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.

### **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?**

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.

### **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?**

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.

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

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.

### **5. How do you usually understand the idea of selfishness? Do you agree with Kisa Gotami that she was being selfish in her grief?**

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.

