

The Sermon At Benares

Answers to NCERT Questions

THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT

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

Ans: When Kisa Gotami's son dies, she goes from house to house, asking if she could get some medicine that would cure her child. No, she does not get it because her child is dead and no medicine could bring him back to life.

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?

Ans: When she met the Buddha, he asked her to get a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent or friend. She went from house to house, but could get the mustard seeds because there was not a single house where no one had died in the family.

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?

Ans: Kisa Gotami understood the second time that death is common to all and that she was being selfish in her grief. There was no house where some beloved had not died.

Yes, this was what Buddha wanted her to understand.

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

Ans: Kisa Gotami understood that death is common to all and that she was being selfish in her grief. She understood this only the second time because it was then that she found that there was not a single house where some beloved had not died.

First time round, she was only thinking about her grief and was therefore, asking for a medicine that would cure her son. When she met the Buddha, he asked her to get a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had died. He did this purposely to make her realise that there was not a single house where no beloved had died, and that death is natural. When she went to all the houses for the second time, she felt dejected that she could not gather the mustard seeds. Then, when she sat and thought about it, she realised that the fate of men is such that they live and die. Death is common to all. This was what the Buddha had intended her to understand.

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

Ans: Selfishness is preoccupation with I, me, and myself. Kisa Gotami was not in a position to think about other people’s grief. It is natural to feel sad over death of near and dear ones. But most people carry on their next responsibility of performing last rites of the dead. People seldom carry a dead body in the hope of some miracle happening to that. The family and the society always come to be those in hour of grief. But later on, life goes on. But Kisa Gotami was so engrossed in her sorrow that she forgot to think about the live members of the family and society.

THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGE

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!*

Ans:

- 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!

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?

Ans: The single sentence using semicolons has a better rhythm. This is because the three parts of the sentence are connected to each other in their meanings. The second clause gives further information on the first clause. The third clause is directly related to both the first and the second. Their meanings are better conveyed when they are joined by semicolons.

Additional Questions

Extract Based Questions (4 Marks each)

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. 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.

- a. Name the holiest of the dipping places on the River Ganges where the Buddha preached his first sermon.
- b. What does Buddha's first sermon reflect?
- c. What did Gautama do after getting enlightenment?
- d. How was he known as then?

Ans:

- a. The Buddha preached his first sermon at Benares.
- b. Buddha's first sermon reflects Buddha's wisdom about one inscrutable kind of suffering.
- c. After getting enlightenment, he began to teach and share his new understandings with the common people.
- d. As he started preaching, he was known as Buddha, meaning, the awakened or the enlightened one.

2. 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.

- a. Why do you think Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless?
- b. How many sons did Kisa Gotami have?
- c. What did she notice while sitting at the wayside?
- d. What message did she get from the flickering and extinguishing lights of the city?

Ans:

- a. It was because she could not find a house where no one had died.

- b. Kisa Gotami had only one son.
- c. She noticed the flickering lights of the city.
- d. Just like the lights of the city, lives flicker up and are extinguished.

3. 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 sufferings of the world, while out hunting chanced upon a sick man, then an aged, 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.

- a. What happened at the age of twelve?
- b. What happened when he was out hunting?
- c. Where was he sent away for schooling?
- d. When did he marry?

Ans:

- a. At the age of twelve, he was sent away for schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures.
- b. He saw a sick man, then an aged man and then a funeral procession.
- c. He was sent away for schooling in the Hindu sacred scriptures.
- d. He married at the age of sixteen after completing his schooling.

4. At about the age of twenty-five, the Prince, heretofore shielded from the sufferings of the world, while out hunting chanced upon a sick man, 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. 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).

- a. When was Gautam Buddha's first encounter with suffering?
- b. How did he react to it?
- c. Why did the prince have no experience of the sufferings of the world till the age of twenty-five?
- d. What effect did the sights have on him?

Ans:

- a. Gautam Buddha's first encounter was when he went out for hunting.
- b. He renounced the worldly comforts and left home to seek enlightenment from these sorrows. The prince had no experience of sufferings.
- c. Because he was shielded from the sufferings of the world.

d. He went out for enlightenment.

5. 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.”

- a. What did Buddha say about the life of the people?
- b. What does a ripe fruit fear?
- c. What happens after reaching age?
- d. According to Buddha, is death avoidable?

Ans:

- a. The life of people is troubled and brief and combined with pain.
- b. A ripe fruit fears the danger of falling.
- c. After reaching age there is death.
- d. There is no means by which those that have been born, can avoid dying.

6. 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 can’t give thee medicine for thy child, but I know a physician who can.” And the girl said, “Pray to 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.”

- a. Why was Kisa Gotami in grief?
- b. What did she ask of all her neighbours?
- c. What had happened to Kisa Gotami’s only son?
- d. Who did she carry her dead child to in her grief?

Ans:

- a. Kisa Gotami was in grief because her son was dead.
- b. She asked all her neighbours for medicine.
- c. Kisa Gotami’s only son was dead.
- d. She carried her dead child to all her neighbours.

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. Kisa compared human life to an inanimate object. What is it and why does she do so?

Ans: Kisa compared human life with the lights of the city which flicker up and extinguishes again, and the darkness of the night spreads everywhere. Similarly, the human takes birth, flickers up and then extinguishes the life of the remains. She compared so because the darkness of sadness spreads in as she was in great grief of the death of his dead son.

2. Which people are referred to as “wise” by the Buddha in his sermons?

Ans: Buddha preached in his sermons that everything that is born will come to its end. Death is inevitable: both young and adult or fools and wise are subject to death. But the people who do not grieve knowing the terms of the world are called wise people. Wise people neither weep nor grieve.

3. Why was Kisa Gotami sad?

Ans: Kisa Gotami's only son had died. She was grief-stricken. Carrying the dead son, she went to all her neighbours to get some medicine that would cure her son. A man sent her to the Buddha who asked her to procure a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had died, but she couldn't find such a house and was thus, sad.

4. Why was Gautama known as the Buddha?

Ans: Gautama sat under a peepal tree until he attained enlightenment. After seven days, he got enlightenment and began to teach and share his new understandings. So he came to be known as the Buddha (the Awakened or the Enlightened).

5. How did the Buddha teach Kisa Gotami the truth of life?

Ans: Buddha changed Kisa's thinking with the help of a simple act—asking her to procure a handful of mustard seeds from that house where none had died. She could not understand it. But gradually, she understood that death is inevitable.

6. Describe the life of Gautama Buddha before enlightenment.

Ans: Buddha was earlier a prince and lived in luxury. When he encountered suffering and grief, it made him sad and sorrowful. He renounced everything and went in search of wisdom. He wandered for seven years. Then, one day, he sat under a peepal tree and vowed not to leave till he was enlightened.

7. To seek peace one has to draw out the arrow of lamentation. State two values projected through the statement.

Ans: No, lamenting can bring someone's dear and near ones back to life. Neither can they stop one's death. Lamenting affects upon one's health. He becomes sick and pale. He loses appetite and interest in life. One has to learn that death is inevitable.

8. What sights moved Siddhartha Gautama to seek the path of enlightenment?

Ans: While going for hunting, Gautama saw a sick man, an old man, a funeral procession and a monk begging. This encounter with the sufferings and grief moved him and he left to seek the path of enlightenment.

9. What did the Buddha preach to the people?

Ans: Buddha said that death is common to all mortals. You cannot avoid it. No amount of weeping and lamenting can bring back a dead. So wise men don't grieve. Weeping and lamenting rather spoil one's health. To overcome sorrow, become free of sorrow.

10. What happened to Kisa Gotami's son? What did she ask her neighbours to give her?

Ans: When her son died, Kisa Gotami went from house to house in order to ask for as everyone said that she was out of her senses due to the death of her son. But she didn't get any medicine for her dead son.

11. What did Kisa Gotami learn in the end?

Ans: Kisa Gotami wandered from house to house to get a handful of mustard seeds but could not find it. She realised that death is common to all. All living beings have to die. She had been selfish in her grief.

12. What does Buddha say about the world?

Ans: Buddha says that the world is a valley of death. There is a path that leads man to immortality, the reality that has been cleansed of all selfishness. Death is common to all. One who is born will die as well. Death is imminent. The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain.

13. Who was Gautama Buddha? When and where was he born?

Ans: Gautama Buddha was the earlier prince, Siddhartha who got enlightenment under a peepal tree and was then named as Gautama Buddha. He was born as a prince in North India.

14. Kisa Gotami was selfish and grief-stricken. Justify.

Ans: Kisa Gotami lost her only son. In her grief, she carried her dead child everywhere and asked people to cure him. As instructed by Buddha, she went door-to-door to get a handful of mustard seeds with condition that there should not be any loss of a child, husband, parent or friend. In her grief, she forgot that everyone had to suffer such type of loss in his or her family. Death is common to all. But in her grief, she became selfish and tried to fulfill the condition that was impossible.

15. How did Siddhartha Gautama get the name of Buddha?

Ans: Siddhartha Gautama sat under a big peepal tree, where he vowed to stay until enlightenment came. He was enlightened after seven days. He began to teach and share his new understandings. Then he came to be known as Buddha.

16. What did Buddha ask the lady to do?

Ans: Buddha asked the lady to bring a handful of mustard-seeds. But these must be taken from a house where no one had ever lost a child, husband or a friend. Only then he would be able to help her.

17. Where did Buddha preach his first sermon?

Ans: After the attainment of enlightenment, Buddha preached his first sermon at the holy city of Benaras which is situated on the sacred river Ganges.

18. With what does Buddha compare the death and decay of human beings?

Ans: Gautama Buddha says that just as ripe fruit are liable to fall, so are mortals. They are always in danger of death. Earthen vessels made by the potter end in being broken. The life of all mortals will ultimately meet death.

Long Answer Questions (100-150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. How did Buddha make Kisa Gotami realise about the reality of death?

Ans: Kisa Gotami had only one son and he had died. In her great grief, she does not know how to revive her son. She goes to all her neighbours asking them for medicine. A man suggested to her to go to Buddha. Kisa Gotami went to Buddha and prayed to him to revive her son. The Buddha told her to procure a handful of mustard seeds from a house where nobody had ever died. Kisa Gotami went from door-to-door to get the mustard seeds. But when she asked them if anyone had died in the family they could only answer that they had lost many. Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless, and realised that death is common to all.

2. How did Buddha seek and achieve enlightenment?

Ans: Once Gautama went for hunting. On the way, he saw a sick man, an old man, a funeral procession and a begging monk. He was filled with sorrow. He renounced everything and went out into the world to seek enlightenment concerning the sorrows he had witnessed after having wandered for seven years. Buddha sat under a peepal tree till he was enlightened. After being enlightened, that took a week's time, he renamed the tree as Bodhi Tree (Tree of Wisdom) and began to preach.

3. Through the story of Kisa Gotami, what did the Buddha try to preach to the common man?

Ans: Buddha said that death is common to all mortals. Those who are born must die one day. You cannot avoid it. Death is certain. He taught this, through the story of Kisa Gotami. Kisa was a common woman whose son had died. She could not believe it and carried her son to neighbours requesting them to give her a medicine to cure him. People thought that she was not in her senses. She approached Buddha. He asked her

to procure a handful of mustard seeds, but he put a condition that they should be procured from a house where no death has ever taken place. Kisa could not find such a house. She, sad and depressed, sat on the sidewalks and watched city lights that flickered and extinguished. It made her realise that human lives flicker and extinguish as well and that death is an unavoidable phenomenon. She thought herself to be selfish for thinking only about her grief.

4. What did Buddha say about death and suffering? Explain by giving examples from the text.

Ans: Buddha said that death is common to all mortals. Those who are born must die one day. You cannot avoid it. Death is certain. As ripe fruits fall off the trees and meet an end, so do the lives of the mortals. Life of a man is like an earthen pot that breaks and meets its end. No amount of weeping and lamenting can bring a dead back to life. So wise men don't grieve. They understand that it is the law of nature. Also, weeping and lamenting bring no gain. It rather spoils one's health and gives more pain. If only you take out the arrow of lamentation and get composed, you will get peace of mind. To overcome sorrow, become free of sorrow.

5. What impression do you form of Lord Buddha after reading the lesson, "The Sermon at Benares"?

Ans: Buddha was born in North India as a prince and named Siddhartha. Once he went out hunting. On the way, he saw a sick man, an old man, a funeral procession and a monk begging for alms. He was overcome with grief. He renounced all pleasures and luxuries offered by royalty, and went out into the world to seek enlightenment concerning the sorrows he witnessed. After attaining enlightenment, he gave his first sermon at Benares. It reflects wisdom on 'suffering'. He said the life of man is short, full of troubles and pain. Man is a ripe fruit, the fruit falls and the man dies. One must overcome from death and pain, and draw out the arrow of lamentation. Buddha was a wise man who made people understand the difficult concept of suffering and death.

6. Who was Gautama Buddha? What made him renounce his royal life and become a monk?

Ans: Gautama Buddha was born in 563 B.C. He was born in a royal family. His name was Siddhartha Gautama. At the age of twelve, he was sent away for schooling. He studied all the sacred Hindu scriptures. At the age of sixteen, he married a princess. They had a son. For ten years, the couple passed a happy life. Siddhartha had been shielded from the sufferings of the world. However, when he was twenty-five, Siddhartha saw a sick man, then an aged man, then a funeral procession. Finally, he came across a monk begging for alms. This was his first encounter with the harsh realities of life. These sights made him so sad that he decided to renounce the worldly pleasures. He left his family and became a monk. He went out into the world to seek spiritual knowledge.

7. Why did Siddhartha come to be called the Buddha? Where did he give his first sermon?

Ans: Siddhartha Gautama wandered for seven years in search of wisdom and truth. Finally, he sat down under a big peepal tree to meditate. He vowed to stay there until he got enlightenment. After seven days, Gautama got enlightenment. He named the tree as the 'Bodhi Tree', that is 'The Tree of Wisdom.' He became known as 'the Buddha' which means 'enlightened' or 'the awakened'. He began to teach and to spread his message of wisdom and truth. The Buddha gave his first sermon at Benares. It is the holiest of places on the bank of the Ganges. His first sermon reflects his wisdom about one kind of suffering, i.e., death. Here, the Buddha tells about the universality of death which is inevitable and can't be escaped.

Self- Assessment Test

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. "Of those who, overcome by death, depart from life", a father cannot save his son, for 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. Not from weeping nor 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.

- a. What is the fate of mortals?
- b. Why do the wise not grieve?
- c. Why does the writer compare mortals with an ox?
- d. How does 'lamentation' harm a person?

2. The Buddha answered, "I want a handful of mustard-seed". And when the girl in 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."

- a. Identify 'I' in the passage.
 - b. What did the Buddha ask the girl for?
 - c. What was the condition imposed on the girl?
 - d. In this way, what did the Buddha want Kisa Gotami to understand?
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Short Answer Questions

1. How do weeping and grieving affect us?

2. Where and when did Siddhartha become the Buddha?
 3. What is Gautama Buddha's opinion about death?
 4. Who was Gautama Buddha?
 5. What does she ask for the second time around? Does she get it? Why not?
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Long Answer Questions

1. How did Gautama Buddha teach Gotami that life is full of pains and sorrows and death comes to all?
2. Buddha said, "The world is affected by death and decay, therefore, the wise men do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world." Do you think the statement is appropriate even for today's life? Write your views.
3. "If one seeks peace, one should draw out the sorrow of lamentation." What do you infer from the Buddha's statement?