

The Sermon at Benares

Oral Comprehension Check (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:

Kisa Gotami was overcome with grief and agony when her only son died. She carried her son's dead body in her arms and went from one house to another asking for medicine that could cure her child, but nobody could help. Since her son was dead, it wasn't possible for anyone to give her any medicine and bring the 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, the second time around? Does she get it? Why not?

Answer:

Gautama Buddha asked Kisa Gotami to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had lost a child, husband, parent or friend. She went from door to door, but couldn't find a single house where death had not knocked their door and taken away their beloved one. Hence, she did not get any such house as death is inevitable and all mortals who come to this world are bound to die someday.

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:

When Kisa Gotami failed to procure a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death never took away any beloved one, she became weary and helpless and sat down by the roadside. While sitting there, she observed the flickering and extinguishing of lights and finally the darkness of the night reigned everywhere. This incident made her realise that death is inevitable and she was being selfish in her grief and agony. She understood that in this valley of desolation, there is always a path that leads man, who has surrendered all his selfishness, to immortality.

Yes, this is what Buddha wanted her to understand that every mortal 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:

In the first instance, Kisa Gotami could only see her grief of losing her young son. But, when she went

from one house to another the second time to procure a handful of mustard seeds to save her dead son, she understood that everyone was dealing with the loss of a dear one. Not a single house was left untouched by death, where people had not lost their son, husband, parent or friend. At some point of time, everyone had experienced the pain of death and losing their loved ones. Feeling dejected, she sat down and realised that death is inevitable and the fate of mortal beings is to live and die someday. Through this instance, Gautama Buddha helped her to understand that death is common to all mortal beings and everyone is bound to die one day or the other.

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 is extremely preoccupied about himself or herself. In the story, Kisa Gotami was also being selfish in her grief because she was just thinking about her own pain. So when she lost her child, she wanted to bring him back to life by any means and finally went to Buddha to ask for help. He gave her the ultimate lesson of life that humans are mortal beings and it is natural for everyone to die. Although we may find it difficult to accept the death of our loved ones, death is inevitable and is bound to happen sooner or later.

Thinking about Language (Page 136)**Question 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!*

Answer:

- Give you medicine for your child
- Please tell me
- Kisa went to the Buddha
- There was not a single house where no one had died
- Relatives
- Listen

Question II:

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?

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.

Answer:

The single sentence using semicolons has a better cadence and rhythm. This implies that the three parts of the sentence are connected to each other in their meanings. The second clause gives a detailed information of the first clause. The third clause is therefore, directly related to both the first and the second clause. Their meanings are conveyed in a better way when they are joined by semicolons.

Writing (Page 138)

Question 1:

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:

Activity to be done by yourself.