



## **Summary**

‘The Sermon at Benares’ is a chapter written by Betty Renshaw. The chapter covers the journey of Gautama Buddha from prince hood to his saintly life. After seeing the suffering of the world, he decided to give up all worldly pleasures and seek enlightenment. He finally attained salvation under a tree of Bodhgaya. His first sermon was delivered at Benares near the bank of the Ganges. Kisa Gotami was the first one to receive his sermon.

### **Buddha as a Prince**

Gautama Buddha was born as a prince named Siddhartha Gautama in Northern India. At twelve, he was sent for schooling in Hindu sacred scriptures. Four years later, he returned home and got married to a princess. They had a son. They lived a royal life for ten years.

### **Gautama Feels Sufferings of the World**

He was protected from the sufferings of the world. One day, he saw a sick man, an old man, a funeral procession and a monk begging for money and food. This moved Buddha and he went out to seek enlightenment.

### **Gautama Seeks Enlightenment**

He travelled aimlessly for seven years and then he stayed under a peepal tree until he attained enlightenment. After seven days, he got enlightened and renamed the tree as Bodhi Tree (Tree of Wisdom). There, he began to teach and share his knowledge and became known as Buddha.

### **Buddha Gives his First Sermon**

Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares. It is the holiest of the dipping places on the river Ganges. This sermon reflects Buddha’s wisdom about the kind of suffering that is impossible to interpret.

### **Kisa Gotami’s Story**

Kisa Gotami had only one son who had died. She carried her dead son in her arms and went door to door asking for medicines for her dead child. They were as helpless as Kisa and couldn’t go against the will of God. Finally, somebody suggested that she should go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha. Kisa Gotami went to meet Gautama Buddha. Gautama told her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where death had never knocked at the door. Kisa thought that it was a very easy task. She went to all the houses in the village but couldn’t find a single house where death had not taken a beloved away.

### **Buddha’s Reply to Kisa Gotami**

The life of mortals is troubled, brief and combined with pain. It is not possible to avoid death. As the ripe fruits are in danger of falling, as the earthen vessels made by the potter break, similarly the mortals have the danger of death. Wise men and fools, all fall in the power of death. Only the wise do not grieve and they accept the reality. All weeping and grieving will bring more pain and sufferings to the body. Once, who is composed, will obtain peace of mind and will be free from sorrow and be blessed.

**Q1. Who was Gautama Buddha? When and where was he born?**

**Ans.** Gautama Buddha was a Prince who was named Siddhartha Gautam by his parents. He was born in 563 B.C. in North India. He had been shielded from the sufferings of the world. He attained enlightenment under a Peepal tree and named the tree as ‘Tree of Wisdom’.

**Q2. Mention the incident which prompted Prince Siddhartha to become a beggar?**

**Ans.** Once Prince Siddhartha had gone for hunting where he came across a sick man, an aged man, a monk asking for alms and also witnessed a funeral procession. Unable to understand those sufferings, he became a beggar and went in search of spiritual knowledge.

**Q3. Why was Kisa Gotami sad? What did she do in her hour of grief?**

**Ans.** Kisa Gotami was sad because her only son had died. In her hour of grief, she went from house to house in search of a medicine to cure him. She had become selfish in wanting her son back.

**Q4. What did the Buddha want Kisa Gotami to understand?**

**Ans.** Buddha wanted Kisa Gotami to understand that death is common to all and no one could avoid dying, no one can save their relatives. So, the wise do not grieve after accepting this truth of dead.

**Q. 5. Kisa Gotami again goes from house-to-house after she speaks with the Buddha. What does she ask for the second time? Does she get? Why not?**

**Ans.** Kisa Gotami goes from house to house to bring some mustard seeds where no death had taken place as asked by Buddha to cure her son. But she was unable to find such a house where no death had taken place. It made her realize that death is inevitable and that no one can deny the nature’s cycle.

**Q6. What did Kisa Gotami learn in the end?**

**Ans.** In the end, Kisa Gotami realized and learnt that death is common to all and that no one could avoid dying. People weep over their dead ones but it is only the wise who do not grieve as they have accepted the truth. A person should only try to seek inner peace.

**Q7. How did Buddha teach Kisa Gotami the truth of life?**

**Ans.** Kisa Gotami was devastated by the death of her only son and wandered door to door, seeking help. Someone directed her to Sakyamuni, the Buddha, who asked her to bring a handful of mustard seeds. This raised a hope in Gotami’s heart that her son could be revived. But the condition imposed by Sakyamuni was that the seeds should be from a house where people had not lost a loved one to death. Kisa Gotami’s futile search made her realize the bitter truth that sorrows are a part and parcel of life and one can attain peace only by acceptance.

**Q8. What did the Buddha do after he had attained enlightenment? Why?**

**Ans.** Prince Siddhartha Gautama was deeply pained by the sufferings he saw around him and left house to seek the truth of life. After wandering for seven years, he finally sat under Peepal tree to meditate till he received the enlightenment. Wisdom of the law that governs the cycle of birth and death dawned on him and 'The Buddha' set out to share it with the world to relieve the mortals of their sufferings.

**Q9. What does the Buddha say about the world?**

**Ans.** The Buddha says that everything in this world is subject to death. He further says that the world is deeply affected by suffering, disease or pain. Inevitably there is death and decay.

**Q10. What lesson on death and suffering did Buddha teach Gotami in the chapter, 'The Sermon at Benares'?**

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## **Extract Based Questions**

**Question 1: Gautama Buddha (563 BC – 483 BC) 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.**

**i) Who was Gautama Buddha?**

- a) A prince
- b) A Peasant
- c) A trader
- d) A robber

**ii) What did Gautama Buddha study?**

- a) The Bible
- b) The Quran
- c) The Hindu sacred scriptures
- d) Buddhism

**iii) When did Gautama Buddha marry?**

- a) At the age of twelve years
- b) At the age of sixteen years
- c) At the age of eighteen years
- d) At the age of twenty years

**iv) .....in the extract means 'people of the royal family'**

- a) Prince
- b) Scared
- c) Befitted
- d) Royalty

- Answer:** i) a) A prince  
ii) c) The Hindu scared scriptures  
iii) b) At the age of sixteen years  
iv) d) Royalty

**Question 2: 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.**

**i) What did Gautama Buddha witness while hunting?**

- a) Sufferings of the people in various forms
- b) Joy of the life outside palace
- c) Beauty of nature
- d) The pleasure of hunting

**ii) What did Buddha finally see?**

- a) A sick man
- b) An aged man
- c) A funeral procession
- d) A monk begging for alms

**iii) What impact did all these sights had on Buddha?**

- a) He went to seek enlightenment?
- b) He renounced the life
- c) He became very indifferent
- d) He conquered the world

**iv) ..... in the extract means ‘a state of high spiritual knowledge’.**

- a) Shielded
- b) Sufferings
- c) Enlightenment
- d) Procession

**Answer:** i) a) Sufferings of the people in various forms

ii) d) A monk begging for alms

iii) a) He went to seek enlightenment

iv) c) Enlightenment

## **Short Answer Type Questions and Answers**

**Question 1: Why did Prince Siddhartha leave the palace and become a beggar?**

Once Prince Siddhartha, while hunting, saw a sick man, then an aged man, then a funeral procession and finally a monk begging for alms. Looking at his, he left the palace and became a beggar to search for enlightenment.

**Question 2: What do you know about the early life of Buddha?**

Gautama Buddha was born in a royal family. His childhood name was Siddhartha. At the age of twelve, he was sent away for schooling in Hindu sacred scriptures and four years later he got married to a princess.

**Question 3: What was the effect of the sufferings of the world on Buddha?**

At the age of 25, while hunting, one day Buddha saw a sick man, then an aged man, then a funeral procession and finally a monk begging for alms. These moved him so much that he went out into the world to seek enlightenment.

**Question 4: What did the Buddha do after he had attained enlightenment?**

When Buddha attained enlightenment, he started preaching and telling people about life and its meaning. He spread his preaching far and wide so that people could come to terms with the truth. He shared his knowledge with people through his teachings.

**Question 5: Where did Buddha preach his first sermon?**

Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon at the city of Benares, which is regarded as the holiest of the dipping places on the river Ganges. The sermon reflects his wisdom about the kind of suffering.

**Question 6: Why was Kisa Gotami sad? What did she do in her hour of grief?**

Kisa Gotami was sad over the death of her only son. In the hour of grief, she went door to door in order to find medicine for her son that could bring him to life. But nobody could provide any medicine.

**Question 7: According to Kisa Gotami what is the greatest grief in life?**

According to Kisa Gotami, the greatest grief in life is the death of one's loved ones and one's inability to stop them from dying. Therefore, instead of lamenting on it, the wise should accept the truth of death. Weeping will only increase the pain and disturb the peace of mind of a person.

**Question 8: How did Kisa Gotami realise that life and death is a process?**

Kisa Gotami went from house to house but was unable to find one house where nobody had died. She was tired and hopeless and sat down at the wayside watching the lights of the city as they flickered up (keep going on and off) and were extinguished again.

She realised that similar to the city lights human lives also flicker up for some time and are extinguished again.

**Question 9: What did Buddha say about death and suffering?**

After enlightenment, Buddha started to spread his teachings about life. He told that death and suffering are the part and parcel of life. None can avoid this truth. One has to meet one's destined and one day. Whoever has come to the world, will die one day. In the hour of grief, one must remain calm and composed so that grief doesn't overcome one. People who are wise, never complain or lament over their loss. They accept the truth and be blessed with it. So, the wisdom lies in the fact that people should not get distressed with pain, suffering and death.

## **Long Answer Type Questions and Answers**

**Question 1: Life is full of trials and tribulations. Kisa Gotami also passes through a period of grief in her life. How does she behave in those circumstances?**

After the death of Kisa Gotami's only child, she became very sad. She carried her dead child to her neighbours in order to get medicine to bring him to life. Her neighbours thought that she had gone insane as she was unable to accept the fact that her child is dead. It was then that someone suggested her to meet Gautama Buddha. When she met Gautama Buddha, he gave her an exercise to do. She was asked to collect mustard seeds from a house where no one had ever died. She went from one house to another but was unable to find a single house in the town where no one had died. This way she realised that death is a part of life and anyone who is bound to die one day. Thus, Buddha changed her understanding of death by this exercise. Buddha told her that only the wise do not grieve and they accept the reality. Mourning brings only pain and sufferings to the body. One, who is composed, obtains peace of mind and will be free from sorrow and be blessed. This gave her strength to overcome grief.

**Question 2: Personal losses are a part and parcel of life. Instead of wailing on them, we should move on in life. This message of Gautama Buddha has become more relevant in modern times. Do you agree? Why/ why not?**

Yes, I agree with the message that Gautama Buddha had given about life. In the modern times, people have a lot to explore and move with the world at the same place. If people don't understand the practicality (practical aspect of reality) of life, they will be under stress which would in turn affect their personal and professional lives. People need to understand that everyone who is born will have to die one day. There is no use being sad or crying over the loss. People should remain calm and composed in such situations. They should face the truth and move on in life.

In today's world, people have to explore their growth prospects at a broader aspect. The pace of life is so fast that to catch it, we all have to move on in life as it never waits for anyone. We have to accept the truth of life and death and should think about the younger generation and the persons who are alive.

**Question 3: What lesson on death and suffering did the Buddha teach Gotami in the chapter, 'The Sermon at Benaras'.**

The lesson on death and suffering that Buddha taught Gotami was that these are part and parcel of life. No one can avoid this truth. One has to meet one's destined end one day. Whoever has come into this world will die one day. Thus, in the house of grief for a loved one who had died, one must remain calm and composed so that one doesn't become overcome with grief. Otherwise, they will feel the pain more. However, those persons who are wise never complain or lament over their loss, or even try to bring back to life their loved ones who are dead, as Gotami wanted to do. They accept the truth and overcome their sorrow. Persons who overcome their sorrows will be blessed. So, wisdom is in the fact that people should not get distressed with pain, suffering and death.

**Q.4. "The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain...." with this statement of the Buddha, find out what Kisa Gotami learnt after the death of her child.**

According to Buddha, all men are mortal so those who have been born cannot avoid dying. Life of mortal is always troubled and brief. Sorrow and suffering are inevitable to the mortals. All young and adult fall into the power of death; all are subject to death. So, the wise do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world. Kisa Gotami after the death of her child learnt from lord Buddha that death is common to all; he who has overcome pain will become free from pain, and be blessed.

**Q.5. The sight of a sick man, an aged man, a funeral procession and a monk made Siddhartha leave his home and go out in search of enlightenment. What lesson about life do you learn from this episode?**

Siddhartha lived a life full of luxuries till the age of twenty-five. Once when he went outside to hunt, he saw a sick man, an aged man, a funeral procession and finally, a monk begging for alms. The sight moved Siddhartha so much that he left the home and went in search of enlightenment. The incident revealed a great truth — life is short. Beauty, riches, comforts all are transitory and vanish one day. If we all understand this fact and work towards making our life valuable for others, there would be no fight, grudges and pain. When somebody does something wrong, he/she forgets that one day we are going to be punished for our wrong deeds. In our trouble, we should have faith in God to struggle in life and wait for good times to come.

**Q6. What is the truth of life, according to Buddha? How should a wise man behave in times of trouble or mis happenings?**

According to Buddha, all men are mortal. One who is born, is sure to die. All things in nature die and are reborn—be it animals, plants or objects. Some people start behaving like a madman whenever a problem arises in their life. They lose their sense of reasoning and become depressed. But this is not a solution to come out of your grief. A sensible person understands the realities of life and remains balanced in all the situations. The lesson here is that whenever we come across a problem, we should try to find out its solution. Instead of blaming our fate or others, we must think deep for the reason of that problem. By being calm, resolute and contented, most of the problems can be solved.

**Q 7. A timely help and sympathy is a great help for those who are in grief. Gautama Buddha helped Kisa Gotami by his kind words and guidance in overcoming her grief. It is a big relief for the grieving person if support and care are extended to them. How are kindness and sympathy important in a peaceful and joyful life?**

Most people in our society are unhappy and grieved because the values of kindness and sympathy are missing day by day from our life. There is no timely guidance and help. People suffer because of their ignorance or their lack of knowledge about the reality of life. They do not accept the things as they are overambitious and unnecessary craving for the things make them ultimately suffer. They are not satisfied with what they have. They desire for the things they don't deserve for and suffer. People are not kind to one another. There is lack of sympathy for one another. This all leads to sufferings. Kisa Gotami suffers because of her selfish desire and craving for her son. Gautama Buddha relieves her from her pain by his guidance and kindness. All human beings are victims of such desires and they suffer but the timely guidance and kindness may help them. Timely help and sympathy is a great help for those who are in grief. Gautama Buddha helped Kisa Gotami by his words love and guidance in overcoming her grief. It is a big relief for the grieving person if support and care are extended to them in time

**Q.8. Kisa Gotami lost her only son and grieved. She is desperate in saving his life. She goes from one place to another. She is criticized for this act of desperation and is called mad. Is it not a normal reaction of a normal human being? Is it justified to criticize Kisa Gotami? What is your opinion?**

Kisa Gotami lost her only son and grieved. She is desperate in saving his life. She goes from one place to another. She is criticized for this act of desperation and is called mad. But I find it a normal reaction of a normal human being. Every mother has such feelings for her son. Every possible effort is made to save a life. Kisa Gotami is also a normal mother who wants her son to come to life. Her action is a normal action. A person loses his common sense when one is grieved. All logic or reasoning fails. No doubt one has to accept the universal truth of life and death. But it takes time to understand it. Kisa Gotami's action was a normal act and she should not be called a mad woman. It is a normal action of a grieving mother. It is easy to say that in case of any loss one should be quiet, calm and composed but is difficult to put in practice.