



Kisa Gotami and the Mustard Seed

(Before you tell the story you can show the children some mustard seeds, as they might not know them)

Kisa grew up in an Indian village a long time ago. When she was quite young, she got married and went to live with her husband's family in a town called Kapilavattu. When she first moved in with them, things were difficult. She missed her village, her family, and her friends. She felt that no one liked her and that everything she did was wrong. Then, when her son was born, everyone was very pleased and her life improved. But when the baby was still tiny, her husband died. Kisa was very upset. "At least I still have my little son," she thought.

One sad day, the baby also became very ill and died. Kisa was so unhappy that she just couldn't believe her baby was dead. She thought he must be asleep. She wanted to find some special medicine that would make him better and began asking everyone. First she asked her neighbour. "Please, can you help me?" she asked. "I need some special medicine for my baby."

"I'm sorry, Kisa," said the woman, "I'm too busy to stop now. Why don't you ask the shopkeeper?" Sadly, Kisa thanked her and went to find the shopkeeper. But the shopkeeper only told her to ask the doctor.

"Please, can you help me?" Kisa asked the doctor. "I need some special medicine for my baby." The doctor looked at the baby in Kisa's arms. He could see that it was dead.

"I'm sorry, Kisa," he said. "I haven't got the medicine you need."

Was there anyone who could help Kisa, he wondered? Then he remembered that the Buddha was staying nearby. He was wise and very kind. Maybe he would know how to help. "Kisa," he suggested, "why don't you go and ask the Buddha?"

The Buddha was sitting in the shade of a tree talking to his friends when Kisa ran up to him. He could see straight away that she was very upset. "How can I help you?" he asked.

"My name is Kisa," she replied. "I have been looking everywhere for medicine for my son." The Buddha looked at the little bundle in Kisa's arms. How could Kisa be helped to accept the truth that her little boy had really died?

"Kisa, if you want to make some medicine, you must have some mustard seeds," said the Buddha. "Go into town and ask at each house, but you must only accept seeds from a house in which no one has died."

Quickly, Kisa set off into town to get the mustard seeds. At the first house a young woman answered the door.

"Could I have some mustard seeds to make some medicine?" Kisa asked.

The woman went back inside and soon returned with some seeds.

"Here you are," said the woman, smiling.

Kisa was just about to take the seeds when she remembered the Buddha's words.

"Oh, I nearly forgot," said Kisa. "Has anyone died in this house?"



“Ah, yes,” replied the young woman. “A few months ago my grandmother died, very peacefully. She was a lovely old lady and we remember her very fondly. But why do you ask?” “Thank you for getting me the seeds,” said Kisa, “but I can only take them from a house in which no one has died.”

Kisa said goodbye and went on to the next house. An old man was sitting outside.

“Please, have you got some mustard seeds to spare?” she asked him.

Slowly, the old man got up and went into the house. Soon he emerged with some seeds.

“Here you are,” he said, holding out his hand. Again, just as Kisa was about to take the seeds, she remembered what the Buddha had said.

“Has anyone died in this house recently?” she asked.

“Ah,” replied the old man sadly, “just last year the lady of the house, my daughter, passed on. We all still miss her.”

“I am sorry to hear your sad news,” said Kisa.

“Thank you for getting me the seeds, but I’m afraid I can’t take them after all.”

At the next house she came to, a young boy answered the door.

“Please, have you got some mustard seeds to spare?” she asked.

“I’m sure we have,” said the boy. “Wait there and I’ll ask my mum.”

Soon the boy came back with the seeds. “Here you are.” This time, Kisa remembered!

“Can you tell me please if anyone has ever died in this house?” she asked.

“Yes,” replied the boy quietly. “When I was still a little baby, my dad died. I can’t even remember him.”

“I’m sorry about your dad,” said Kisa, “and thank you for getting me the seeds, but I can’t use them after all.”

As Kisa went from door to door, the answer was the same. Everyone had lost a loved one; if not last year, then a long time ago. Kisa had no mustard seeds but now she understood why she would not be able to find any. She looked at the little bundle in her arms. “I am sorry, my little one, you have gone to another life and I did not want to let you go. Let us find a resting place for you.”

In the evening, she returned to the Buddha. She was no longer carrying the little bundle. Her face was now much calmer.

“Have you been able to find the mustard seeds, Kisa?” he asked.

“No,” she replied, “but now I understand that everyone loses people they love. I have laid my baby to rest, and am now at peace. Thank you.” “You have done well, Kisa,” said the Buddha, “for there is nothing stronger in all the world than a mother’s love. Would you like to stay with me for a while?”

As the sun went down over Kapilavattu, Kisa and the Buddha talked. She told him about her life and her baby. He listened kindly. The Buddha reminded Kisa that plants grow in the spring, flower in the summer,



and die in the winter—and that new plants grow the following year. Similarly, people are born and eventually die. Kisa now understood that was just how things are.

Talking to the Buddha and listening to his kind words helped Kisa a lot. That very evening she decided to become one of his followers.

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Questions about the story

1. What did you find the most beautiful moment in the story and why?
2. Why do you think the Buddha tells his lesson to Kisha Gotami in this way?
3. What would your advice be for Kisha Gotami if she came to you for help?
4. What helps you when you have lost someone or something?
5. Is death ordinary or extraordinary?
6. Would you live your life differently if you always remembered that things and people will pass? In which way?

