

## **DHARMA REFLECTION**

### **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

Gotami was her family name, but because she tired easily, she was called Kisa Gotami, or Frail Gotami. She was born at Savatthi in a poverty-stricken house. When she grew up, she married, going to the house of her husband's family to live. There, because she was the daughter of a poverty-stricken house, they treated her with contempt. After a time she gave birth to a son. Then they accorded her respect.

But when that boy was old enough to play and run hither and about, he died. Sorrow sprang up within her. Thought she: Since the birth of my son, I, who was once denied honor and respect in this very house, have received respect. These folk may even seek to cast my son away. Taking her son on her hip, she went about from one house door to another, saying, "Give me medicine for my son!"

Wherever people encountered her, they said: "Where did you ever meet with medicine for the dead?" So saying, they clapped their hands and lighted in derision. She had not the slightest idea what they meant.

Now a certain wise person saw her and thought: This woman must have been driven out of her mind by sorrow for her son. But medicine for her, no one else is likely to know – the Buddha alone is likely to know. Said he: "Woman, one the Buddha will know the medicine for your son." Go to him and ask."

Thinking that he spoke the truth, she took her son on her hip, went to the Buddha and said, "O, Exalted One, give me medicine for my son!"

The Teacher, seeing that she was ripe for understanding, said, "You did well, Gotami, in coming here for medicine. Go enter the city, make the rounds of the entire city, beginning at the beginning and in whatever house no one has ever died, from that house fetch tiny grains of mustard seed."

"Very well, reverend sir," she said. Delighted in heart, she entered within the city, and at the very first house said, "The Buddha asked me to fetch mustard seeds for medicine for my son. Give me some grains of mustard seed."

“We will, Gotami,” they said. But when they brought the seeds to her she said, “Has anyone ever died in this house?”

What do you say, Gotami! It is impossible to count the people who have died in this house.”

“Well, then, I cannot take these seeds. The Buddha told me to only take seeds from houses where no one had died.”

In the same way she went to the second house, and to the third and fourth. Finally she understood: In the entire city this must be the way! The Buddha, full of compassion for the welfare of mankind, must have seen this. Overcome with emotion, she went outside the city, carried her son to the burning-ground, and holding him in her arms, said, “Dear little son, I thought that you alone had been overtaken by this thing called death. But you are not the only one death has overtaken. This is a law common to all people.” So saying, she placed her son in the burning-ground. Then she uttered the following verse:

No village law, no law of market town,  
No law of a single house is this –  
Of all the world and all the worlds of gods  
This only is the Law, that all things are impermanent.