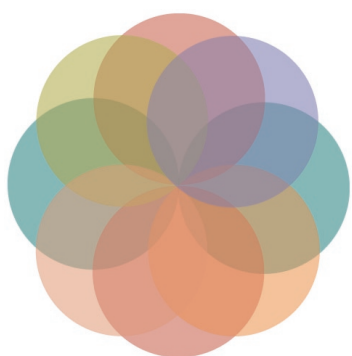


fistula STORIES

EXPLORING FAITH AND ACTION
TO END FISTULA IN THIS
GENERATION



**the story
of faith** SESSION II

Session Goals

To explore the connections between faith and action as well as between ourselves and women dealing with fistula.

Opening Prayer — The Four Vows

Let us all be aware in body, speech, and mind,
And with countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas
In the past, present, and future
Join together in the four vows:
Sentient beings are countless; I vow to save them all
Afflictions are endless; I vow to eradicate them all.
Teachings are measureless; I vow to learn them all.
The Buddha's wisdom is unsurpassed; I vow to attain it.

LEADER'S NOTES

Before Part I begins, you may want to review briefly the content of Session I. Ask the group to define what obstetric fistula is and what causes it. Check to see if all group members have had a chance to visit www.fistulastories.org.

Take turns reading this selection from *Songs of the Sons and Daughters of the Buddha*. After reading, you may want to give a little time for quiet journaling about the questions on the next page before discussing as a group.

RESOURCES FOR THIS SECTION:

Women Active In Buddhism:
<http://lhamo.tripod.com/>

The International Association of Buddhist Women:
<http://www.sakyadhita.org/>

Part I: The Story of Kisa-Gotami

translated by Andrew Schelling and Anne Waldman, *Songs of the Sons and Daughters of the Buddha* (Boston: Shambala, 1996), p. 68-70.

Born into a poor family, Kisa-Gotami was named "Lean Gotami" because of the frailness of her body; when she married, they chided her as "nobody's daughter." When she bore a son, they finally paid her respect. But the boy died young – he'd just turned old enough to run and play – and Kisa went insane with grief. A wild thought came to her: *They will try to take my child and expose him.* So she lifted his corpse upon her hip and went from door to door, begging "give me medicine for my child!" "Medicine? (crazy woman) What for?" was the response. She was out of touch. Someone finally took pity and sent her to the Buddha. He glimpsed the promise in her and instructed, "Go, go, enter the town, and collect a little mustard seed from any house where no one has died." She went from house to house, but at each one someone had died. The truth dawned: *This will be the situation in the whole town.* She finally sought a charnel ground to place her dead child in, murmuring:

No village "law,"
 no city law merely
No law for this clan or
 that one alone
For the whole world, for the gods even
All is impermanent
 this is the truth

"Gotami, did you collect the mustard seed?" the Buddha asked. Gotami answered, "This is the work of the little mustard seed," and requested ordination. She was proclaimed first among wearers of the rough raiment.

(Continued on next page)

The Story of Kisa-Gotami

(Continued from previous page)

Reflecting later, she sang:
Excellent to have wise, noble friends
One should know a few things
It helps your pain
But one should understand how pain arises
 How it ceases
(the Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths)
Mark the sorrow, mark how it comes
Being a woman is painful
Miserable sharing a home with hostile wives
Miserable giving birth in bitter pain
Some cut their own throats
More squeamish women take poison
I saw – like others – my husband die
Two sons dead
And mother, father, brother
Cremated on the funeral pyre
Miserable, a whole family destroyed!
Tears shed for a thousand lifetimes
Watched my babe's flesh devoured by
 dogs, jackals, and tigers
 in the charnel ground
But I survived
quenched desire
Saw the teachings as a mirror
 held up to show me my crazy mind
Now healed
The poisoned darts extracted from my heart
All this done and
done by me

The *theri* Kisa-Gotami
saw herself in the mirror
and witnessed these things

Part 2: Our Stories

- [1] What role do others play in helping Gotami face the death of her child and her own suffering? What does she learn in her search for the mustard seed? How does the story portray engaging in social justice?

- [2] Gotami is unflinching in her acknowledgment of the realities of women's suffering. How might she empower others to face traumatic experiences?

- [3] The story of Gotami draws attention to the mental consequences of trauma and values Buddhist teachings as a mirror that shows her crazy mind. What ideas bring her solace? What role does the mind play in health and healing?

Part 3: Journeying with the stories

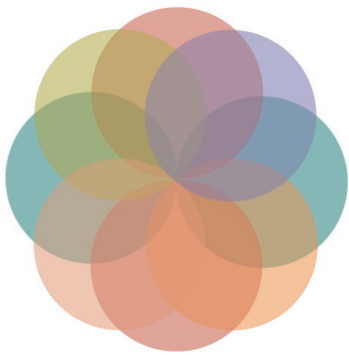
Before our next meeting we/I will:

Closing Prayer — *Metta*, or Loving-kindness

May all living beings be happy
May they be free from animosity
May they be free from oppression
May they be free from trouble
May they live with ease

LEADER'S NOTES

Decide together what you will do to journey with the stories you have heard today until the group next meets. You may commit to telling one person each about fistula, reviewing the blog at www.fistulastories.org and writing your own short reflection to be posted, posting about obstetric fistula to your blog or Facebook, or praying for the women whose stories you have heard as well as those whose stories remain untold.



**the story
of action** SESSION III

Session Goals

To more closely examine our role in working to end fistula in this generation.

Opening Prayer — Vows of Santideva

“May the blind see forms, may the deaf always hear, and may expectant mothers give birth as did Mayadevi, free from pain. May they receive clothing, food and drink, garlands, sandalwood balm, and ornaments, and everything the heart desires conducive to well-being. May the fearful become fearless and those oppressed by grief find joy. May those who are anxious be rid of their anxiety and feel secure. May health come to the sick. May they be freed from every fetter. May those weak find strength, their minds tender toward each other.”

Santideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* Book 10; Verses 19-22 (translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 140.

Part 2: Stories of Action — Sarah's Story

Sarah Omega Kidangasi



Turn back to page 8 and remember Sarah Omega Kidangasi's story. She ended by asking of other fistula sufferers, "how will they know there is still hope?" They will know in part because of the work Sarah has been doing as an ambassador to governments and the United Nations—raising awareness, concern, and money to bring an end to fistula in this generation.

In 2008, Sarah came to Washington DC to advocate on behalf of the millions of women who die each year in childbirth or suffer from related injuries, speaking with US government representatives and dignitaries and encouraging their support of a resolution to reduce maternal mortality in the US and abroad. At a press conference on Capitol Hill she said, "Living with obstetric fistula is a life full of stigma... It is a condition that has left many homes broken. It denies you the freedom to intermingle with others. You live a lonely life, and you are rejected. The worst thing about obstetric fistula is that you become a social outcast." The day after Sarah's visit, the resolution guaranteeing US commitment to reducing maternal mortality that had been introduced by Congresswoman Lois Capps was passed by the US House of Representatives, supported by every Democratic woman member of Congress.¹

And then in 2009, Sarah traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to address the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, whose yearly focus was Global Public Health. The council met especially to discuss the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDG), including MDG 5, which aims to improve maternal health and reduce maternal death—the goal where the least has been achieved to date. The 400 attending ministers of health, ministers of foreign affairs, and ambassadors at the ECOSOC High-Level meeting listened to Sarah tell her story and were confronted with the grim facts that every minute a woman dies needlessly in pregnancy or childbirth, and for every woman who dies, 20-30 women suffer a serious birth injury, of which one of the more devastating is obstetric fistula. Since this meeting, maternal health has been on the radar screen of the United Nations in several ways, including the creation of an Adolescent Girl Taskforce and movements to more fully integrate gender and gender justice work at all levels of the United Nations.²

- [1] Who holds the power in Sarah's story?
- [2] How does Sarah assert power for herself?
- [3] How can Sarah serve as role models for us? For other women in her situation?

LEADER'S NOTES

Look back to Session 1 and remember reading and hearing Sarah Omega Kidangasi's story. Her story did not end there. As we continue to hear her story, take turns reading out loud and listen with openness and respect. As you read and listen, ask the group to note what feelings and questions are coming up for them.

¹ UNFPA, "Fistula Advocates Visit Capitol Hill: Maternal Mortality Resolution Passes House," 22 May 2008 <http://www.americansforunfpa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=729>

² Leyla Alyanak and Katia Iversen for UNFPA, "Advocates Rally World Support to End Fistula; Safe motherhood on the forefront of important UN meeting," 06 July 2009.

LEADER'S NOTES

In the next session, the group will decide together what action we will take as we continue to journey with all of the stories we have heard. The group should commit to visiting www.fistulastories.org/action and reviewing the ideas for action there to discuss in the next session.

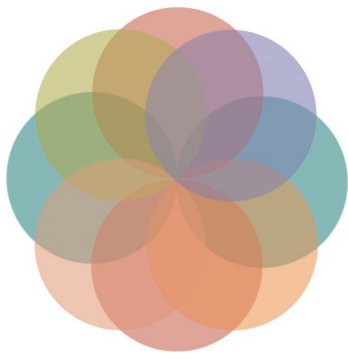
Part 3: Journeying with the stories

Before our next meeting, we will brainstorm action ideas, beginning with visiting www.fistulastories.org/action. In addition, I/we will:

Closing Prayer

May I become at all times, both now and forever
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*
(New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), p. 237.



tell a new story: faith in action

PRAYER FOR SESSION IV

Opening Prayer

“May our hearts be pure,
filled with virtue;
may the pool of the mind ripple
with compassion, love, and truth.

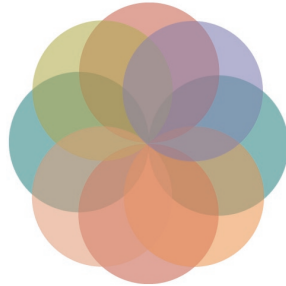
May the three streams of truth, non-violence, and love
join and flow together.
May the dry and withered garden
revive its blooms

When the weight of evil is removed,
the body fills with rapture;
the brimming heart flows over
with the water of pure love.

May all the world enjoy well-being;
may all people be happy.
May poverty and suffering be dispelled;
may the ills of existence be vanquished.

May ripples of love spread
through the pool of the mind.
May every pore give forth the sound
“May all beings be happy!”

S. N. Goenka, *The Gem Set In Gold* (Onalaska, WA:
Vipassana Research Institute, 2006), p. 74.



fistula STORIES

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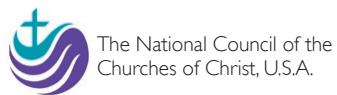
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