



SIDDHARTHA

HERMANN HESSE

Hermann Hesse was born in 1877 and grew up in a missionary family whose religious beliefs deeply influenced him. His best-known works include *Siddhartha*, which explores authenticity, self-knowledge and spirituality.

Siddhartha grew up with his respected Brahmin father in India. Everyone in his village expects Siddhartha to be a successful Brahmin. He enjoys a privileged existence alongside his friend Govinda, but becomes disillusioned with his life and sets out to become an ascetic. Although at home he performs all the rituals of his

religion, he does not think it will ultimately bring him inner peace. He dutifully performs these rituals but this does not bring him happiness and peace. He believes that the Brahmins will not achieve enlightenment. He therefore sets out on long and painful voyage of self-discovery and joins the Samanas, who

believe enlightenment can be reached through asceticism. Later, he becomes entranced by the beautiful courtesan and lives in the material world. But, after spending time there, he finds the middle way as a ferryman. The river teaches Siddhartha is that time does not exist, and that the present is all that matters.

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Truly, nothing in this world kept Siddhartha's thoughts so busy, this mystery of being alive, of being one and being separated and isolated from all others. He looked around as if he was seeing the world for the first time. Beautiful was the world, colourful, strange and mysterious. Here was blue, yellow and green, the sky and the river flowed, the forest and the mountains were all beautiful, all of it was magical, and Siddhartha was on the path to himself.

"How deaf and stupid I have I been," he thought, walking swiftly along. Siddhartha, who was indeed like someone who had just woken up or like a new-born baby, had to start his life anew from the very beginning. When he had left that very morning from the grove in Jetavana, he awoke to the realisation that he was no longer the self that he was, no longer an ascetic, priest or a Brahman. All of this was no longer alongside his path.

He left and in the night when he slept in the straw hut of a ferryman by the river, Siddhartha had a dream: Govinda was standing in front of him, dressed in the saffron robe of an ascetic. Govinda looked sad, but it was not

Govinda any more, he had become a woman with a full breast popping out of her dress. Siddhartha lay and drank, sweetly and strongly tasted the milk from this breast and it tasted of woman and man, of sun and forest, animal, flower and fruit, every joyful desire.

When the day began, Siddhartha asked his host, the ferryman, to get him across the river. The ferryman got him across the river on his bamboo raft, the wide water **shimmered** reddishly in the light of the morning. "This is a beautiful river," he said to his companion. "Yes," said the ferryman, "a very beautiful river, I love it more than anything. Often I have listened to it and looked into its eyes, and always I have learned from it. Much can be learned from a river."

"I then ask you, my **benefactor**," spoke Siddhartha, disembarking on the other side of the river, "I have no gift I can give you for your hospitality and also no payment for your work. I am a man without a home, the son of a Brahman and a Samana."

"I did see it," spoke the ferryman, "and I haven't

expected any payment from you and no gift which would be the custom for guests to bear. You can give me the gift another time."

At about noon, he came through a village. In front of the mud cottages, children were playing in the street and they all **timidly** fled from the unknown Samana. At the end of the village, the path led through a stream where a young woman was kneeling and washing her clothes.

When Siddhartha greeted her, she lifted her head and looked up at him with a smile. He asked her how far he still had to go to reach the large city. She got up and came to him, exchanging humorous banter and, while talking, she made a movement as a woman does who wants to initiate a kind of sexual pleasure with a man.

Before the city, in a beautifully fenced grove, Siddhartha the traveller came across a small group of servants, both male and female, carrying baskets. In their midst, carried by four more servants in an ornamental **sedan** chair, sat a woman on red pillows under a colourful canopy looking invitingly seductive.

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Under her black hair, which was tower high on her head, he saw a fair, delicate and smart face with a bright red mouth. Siddhartha saw how beautiful she was and his heart rejoiced. He bowed deeply when the sedan chair came closer, looked at Kamala's charming face and read for a moment in her eyes with the high arcs above it. With a smile, the beautiful woman nodded for a moment and disappeared into the grove.

"I am entering this city," thought Siddhartha and what a charming omen. He instantly felt drawn to the grove but he was still a Samana. I am still an ascetic and beggar and I must not remain like this. Among the boats by the river, he slept the night and, early in the morning, before the first customers came into his shop, he had the barber's assistant shave his beard, cut and comb his hair and anoint it with fine oil. He then went to take his bath in the river.

Late in the afternoon, the beautiful Kamala approached her grove in her sedan chair. Siddhartha was standing at the entrance and made a bow. He motioned her

servant to him and asked him to inform her that a young Brahman wished to talk to her. After a while the servant returned and asked Siddhartha to follow him into a pavilion where Kamala was lying on a couch.

"Weren't you already standing out there yesterday greeting me?" asked Kamala. "It's true that I've already seen and greeted you," replied Siddhartha. "But didn't you yesterday wear a beard and have long hair with dust in it?" she asked. "You have observed well, you have seen everything.

"You have seen Siddhartha, the son of a Brahman, who left his home to become an ascetic and who has been a Samana for three years. But now I have left that path and come into this city and the first one I met, even before I had entered the city, was you. To say this, I have come to you, Kamala. You are the first woman Siddhartha has not addressed with his eyes turned to the ground."

Kamala smiled, played with her fan of peacocks feathers and asked, "And only to tell me this, that is the reason Siddhartha has come to me?"

"To tell you this and to thank you for being so beautiful. And if it doesn't displease you, Kamala, I would like to ask you to be my friend and teacher, for I know nothing yet of the art which you have mastered in the highest degree." At this Kamala laughed aloud.

"Never before this has happened to me that a Samana from the forest with long hair and an old, torn loincloth came to me and wanted to learn from me.

"Many young men come to me, and there are also sons of Brahmans among them, but they come in beautiful clothes, they come in fine shoes, they have perfume in their hair and money in their pouches. This is how young men come to me."

"You should know that Siddhartha has set harder goals for himself than such **trifles**, and he has reached them. How shouldn't I reach that goal, which I have set for myself yesterday: to be your friend and to learn the joys of love from you. You'll see that I'll learn quickly, Kamala, I have already learned harder things than what you're supposed to teach me."

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Laughing, Kamala exclaimed, "No, you don't satisfy me yet. Clothes are what I must have, pretty clothes, shoes, lots of money in your pouch and gifts for Kamala. Do you realise that now, Samana from the forest? Did you **mark my words?**"

Siddhartha left her and later went to Kamaswami the merchant. He was directed into a rich house, servants led him between precious carpets into a chamber, where he awaited the master of the house. Kamaswami entered swiftly and smoothly with grey hair and very intelligent, cautious eyes. Politely, the host and the guest greeted one another.

"I have been told," the merchant began, "that you were a Brahman, a learned man, but that you seek to be in the service of a merchant. Might you have become destitute, Brahman, so that you seek to serve?" "No," said Siddhartha, "I have not become destitute and have never been destitute. You should know that I have come from the Samanas, with whom I have lived for a long time.

"I am without possessions," continued Siddhartha, "if this

is what you mean. But I am here voluntarily and therefore I am not destitute." "But what are you planning to live on, being without possessions?" Kamaswami asked. "I haven't thought of this yet, sir. For more than three years, I have been without possessions and have never thought about what I should live on."

Kamaswami left the room and returned with a scroll, which he handed to his guest while asking, "Can you read this?" Siddhartha looked at the scroll, on which a sales contract had been written down, and began to read out its contents. "Excellent," said Kamaswami. "And would you write something for me on this piece of paper?" He handed him a piece of paper and a pen, and Siddhartha wrote and returned the paper. Kamaswami read, "Writing is good, thinking is better. Being smart is good, being patient is better."

From then on, Siddhartha lived in the dealer's house. Clothes were brought to him, and shoes, and every day a servant prepared a bath for him. Twice a day, a plentiful meal was served, but he only ate once, never ate meat, nor did he drink wine.

Kamaswami told him about his trade, showed him the merchandise and storage rooms and his business calculations. Siddhartha got to know many new things, heard a lot and spoke little.

And thinking of Kamala's words, he was never subservient to the merchant, forced him to treat him as an equal, even more than an equal. Kamaswami conducted his business with care and often with passion, but Siddhartha looked upon all of this as if it were a game, the rules of which he tried hard to learn precisely, but the contents of which did not touch his heart.

He was not in Kamaswami's house long when he took part in his landlord's business. Daily, at the hour appointed by the beautiful Kamala, he visited her wearing pretty clothes, fine shoes and soon he brought her gifts as well.

He learned a lot from her but he regarded love still as a boy and had a tendency to **plunge** blindly and **insatiably** into lust. She taught him that pleasure cannot be taken without returning it and he steadily learned more about lovemaking.

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He always seemed to be merely playing with business affairs, they never fully become a part of him and they never ruled over him. He was never afraid of failure and never upset by a loss. A friend advised the merchant, "Give him a third of the profits from the business, but let him also be liable for the same amount of the losses. Then he'll become more **zealous**."

Kamaswami followed his friend's advice but Siddhartha cared little about this. When he made a profit, he accepted it with **equanimity**; when he made losses, he laughed and said, "Well, look at this. This one turned out badly."

He saw mankind going through life in a childlike or animal-like manner, which he loved and despised at the same time. He saw them toiling, saw them suffering and becoming grey for the sake of things which seemed to him to entirely unworthy: for money, for little pleasures, for being slightly honoured.

He saw them scolding and insulting each other, he saw them complaining about pain at which a Samana would only smile and would not feel. For a long time, Siddhartha had

lived the life of the world and lust, though without being a part of it, but his senses had been awoken. He had tasted riches, lust and power; nevertheless he had still remained in his heart for a long time a Samana. Kamala, being smart, had realised it was still the art of thinking, waiting and fasting which guided his life.

Years passed by and, surrounded by the good life, Siddhartha hardly felt them fading away. He had become rich and possessed a house, servants of his own and a garden in the city by the river. The people liked him, they came to him whenever they needed money or advice, but there was nobody close to him, except Kamala.

And yet he envied these childlike people and the more similar he became to them he realised they were able to attach to their lives their passions, joys and fears, and the sweet happiness of being in love.

These people were all of the time in love with themselves, with women, their children, honours and money, plans and hopes. He also learned the unpleasant aspects of

their lives, such as when Kamaswami bored him with his **petty** worries.

He had been captured by their world of lust, **covetousness** and **sloth**, and ultimately by that vice which he had used to despise and mock the the most foolish one of all vices: greed. Property, possessions and riches also had finally captured him; they were no longer a game and trifles to him, they had become a shackle and a burden to him. There was something like intoxication in their form of life that made it saturated, lukewarm and dull.

Then the time came when a dream warned him. He had spent the hours of the evening with Kamala, in her beautiful pleasure garden. They had been sitting under the trees talking and Kamala had said thoughtful words, words behind which a sadness and tiredness lay hidden.

Never before had it become so strangely clear to Siddhartha, how closely lust was related to death. Then he had lain by her side and Kamala's face had been close to his.

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VOCABULARY

Shimmered: To shine with a tremulous or flickering light and to gleam faintly. To shine brightly, glisten.

Benefactor: A person who gives money or other help to a person or cause.

Timidly: In a sheepish manner, meekly, timorously, or submissively to an excessive degree. Can also be with a bashful or embarrassed look.

Sedan: Chair carried by two or more porters.

Trifles: Things of little value or importance.

Mark my words: Old-fashioned saying when you tell someone about something that you are certain will happen in the future.

Plunge: Jump or dive quickly and energetically.

Insatiably: Having an appetite or desire for something that cannot be satisfied.

Zealous: Great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective, or to have an huge infatuation for.

Equanimity: Calmness and composure, especially in a difficult situation.

Petty: Unduly concerned with trivial matters, especially in a small-minded way.

Covetousness: Having or showing a great desire to possess something belonging to something.

Sloth: Unwillingness to work or make any effort.

Intoxication: The condition of being drunk, in this case a strong excitement or elation.

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Q&A

Question 1: Siddhartha felt like he had just woken up a new-born baby. What did he think of his new life?

Question 5: What did Siddhartha think about humanity in general at this time?

Overview: Write in your own words what you thought of the story so far and your interpretation of its meaning.

Question 2: What did Siddhartha think of Kamala when he first met her?

Question 6: What did Siddhartha consider as the worst of human vices?

Question 3: Why did Kamala reject him at first and what did he need to do to gain her affection?

Question 7: With all his new-found wealth and riches, what had Siddhartha possessions come to mean to him?

Question 4: What did Siddhartha think about his new job and how did it affect him?

Question 8: When he was sitting in the grove with Kamala, what did he detect in her?