



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.

SIDDHARTHA

LESSON 4

Under her eyes and next to the corners of her mouth he had seen never as clearly before an inscription of small lines, of slight grooves reminiscent of autumnal old age. Tiredness was written on Kamala's beautiful face, tiredness from walking a long path, which had no happy destination. With a sigh, he bid his farewell to her, his soul full of reluctance and full of concealed anxiety.

By then, Siddhartha knew that the game was over, that he could not play it any more. Shivers ran over his body, inside of him, and he felt something had died. The next day, he sat under the mango tree, thinking of his father, Govinda and Gautama. Did he have to leave them to become like Kamaswami? He was still sitting there when night had fallen.

He had to put an end to this life as it had also died in him. He rose, bade farewell to the mango tree and the pleasure garden. Since he had been without food all day he felt hungry and thought of his house in the city, his chamber and bed, of the table with the meals on it. He smiled tiredly, shook himself and bade farewell to all of these things.

In the same hour of the night, Siddhartha left his garden, left the city and never came back. For a long time, Kamaswami had people looking for him, thinking that he had fallen into the hands of robbers. Kamala had no one look for him. When she was told that Siddhartha had disappeared, she was not surprised in the slightest.

Was he not a Samana whose home was nowhere? Later, Kamala became aware that she was pregnant from the last time she was together with Siddhartha. He was now already far from the city as he walked through the forest. He knew nothing but one thing: that there was no going back for him, that the life as he had lived for many years until now was over and done away with, and that he had tasted all of it, sucked everything out of it until he was disgusted with it.

Passionately he wished to know nothing about himself any more, to have rest, to be dead. If only there was a lightning bolt to strike him dead, or a tiger to devour him. If only there was a wine, a poison which would numb his senses, bring him sleep where there would be no awakening from it.

Was there still any kind of filth he had not soiled himself with, any sin or foolish act he had not committed, a dreariness of the soul he had not brought upon himself? Was it still at all possible to be alive? Was it possible to breathe in and out again, to feel hunger, to eat again, to sleep again, to sleep with a woman again? Was this cycle not exhausted and brought to a conclusion for him?

Siddhartha reached the large river in the forest, the same river over which a long time ago, when he had still been a young man and came from the town of Gautama, a ferryman had taken him across. By this river he stopped and hesitantly stood at the bank.

Tiredness and hunger had weakened him. Should he walk on, but wherever to? To what goal? No, there were no more goals, there was nothing left but the deep, painful yearning to shake off this whole desolate dream, to spit out this stale wine, to put an end to this miserable and shameful life. A coconut tree hang over the river and Siddhartha leaned against its trunk with his shoulder, embracing the trunk.

SIDDHARTHA

LESSON 4

He looked down into the green water and found himself filled with the wish to let go and drown himself. A frightening emptiness was reflected back at him by the water, answering to the terrible emptiness in his soul.

Yes, he had reached the end. There was nothing left for him, except to annihilate himself. Then, out of remote areas of his soul a sound stirred up. It was a word, the old word which is the beginning and end of all prayers of the Brahmans, the holy Om. And in the moment when the sound of Om touched Siddhartha's ear, his dormant spirit suddenly woke up and realised the foolishness of his actions.

By the coconut tree Siddhartha collapsed, struck down by tiredness, mumbling Om, placed his head on the root of the tree and fell into a deep sleep. Deep was his sleep and without dreams, for a long time he had not known such a sleep such as this. When he woke up after many hours, he felt as if ten years had passed. He had only come to his senses with the holy word Om on his lips and was looking at the world as a new man.

As Siddhartha straightened up he saw a person sitting opposite him, an unknown man, a monk in a saffron robe with a shaven head, sitting in the position of deep thought. He recognised this monk as Govinda, the friend of his youth, Govinda who had taken his refuge with the exalted Buddha. Govinda had aged too but still his face bore the same features, expressing zeal, faithfulness, searching and timidity.

But when Govinda sensed his gaze he opened his eyes and looked at him. Siddhartha saw that Govinda did not recognise him. Govinda was happy to find him awake; apparently, he had been sitting there for a long time and been waiting for him to wake up.

"I have been sleeping," said Siddhartha. "However did you get here?" "You have been sleeping," answered Govinda. "It is not good to be sleeping in such places, where snakes often are and the animals of the forest have their paths. I am a follower of the exalted Gautama, the Buddha, and have been on a pilgrimage together with several others on this path. I have been watching over you.

"Now that you're awake, let me go to catch up with my brothers." "I thank you, Samana, for watching out over my sleep," spoke Siddhartha. "You're friendly, you followers of the exalted one. Now you may go." "I'm going, sir. May you, sir, always be in good health." "I thank you, Samana."

Govinda made the gesture of a salutation and said, "Farewell." "Farewell, Govinda," said Siddhartha. The monk stopped. "Permit me to ask, sir, from where do you know my name?" Siddhartha smiled. "I know you, Govinda, from your father's hut and from the school of the Brahmans, and from the offerings, and from our walk to the Samanas, and from that hour when you took your refuge with the exalted one."

"You're Siddhartha," Govinda exclaimed loudly. "Now I recognise you and don't comprehend any more how I couldn't recognise you right away. Be welcome, my joy is great to see you again." "It also gives me joy to see you again, Govinda. You've been the guard of my sleep and I thank you, though I wouldn't have required any guard."

SIDDHARTHA

LESSON 4

Siddhartha continued, "It is as it is with you. I'm going nowhere. I'm just travelling, on a pilgrimage." "You're on a pilgrimage?" queried Govinda. "But few would go on a pilgrimage in such clothes and with such hair. Never have I met such a pilgrim, being a pilgrim myself for many years."

"Remember, my dear Govinda: Not eternal is the world of appearances, not eternal are our garments and style of our hair, our hair and bodies. I'm wearing a rich man's clothes and I'm wearing them because I have been a rich man, and I'm wearing my hair like the worldly and lustful people for I have been one of them."

"And now, Siddhartha, what are you now?" "I really don't know. I'm just like you, I'm travelling. I was a rich man and am a not a rich man any more. What will be tomorrow? I just don't know."

With a smiling face, Siddhartha watched him leave, he loved him still. And how could he not have loved everybody and everything in this moment, in the glorious hour after his wonderful sleep, filled with Om.

And it was this very thing, so it seemed to him now, which had been his sickness before, that when he was with the childlike people he was not able to love anybody or anything.

He praised himself, found joy in himself, listened curiously to his stomach, which was rumbling with hunger. He had now in these recent times and days tasted and spat out a piece of suffering, a piece of misery. For how much longer could he have stayed with Kamaswami, made money, wasted money, filled his stomach and let his soul die of thirst?

"It is good," he thought, "to get a taste of everything for oneself, which one needs to know. That lust for the world and riches do not belong to the good things I had already learned as a child. I have known it for a long time but I have experienced it only now. And now I know it, don't just know it in my memory but in my eyes, my heart and in my stomach. Good for me to know this."

Siddhartha also got some idea of why he had fought his self in vain as a Brahman. Too much knowledge had held

him back, too many holy verses, too many sacrificial rules, too much self-castigation, so much doing and striving for that goal. Full of arrogance, he had been, always the smartest, always working the hardest, always one step ahead of all others, always the knowing and spiritual one.

Now he saw that the secret voice had been right, that no teacher would ever have been able to bring about his salvation. Therefore, he had to go out into the world, lose himself to lust and power, to woman and money, had to become a merchant, a dice gambler, a drinker and a greedy person until the priest and Samana in him was dead. He had to spend a dreary and wasteful life to finally realise this.

"By this river I want to stay," thought Siddhartha. It is the same one he had crossed a long time ago on his way to the childlike people, when a friendly ferryman had guided him. He is the one Siddhartha wanted to go to, his path had led him into a new life which now had grown old and is dead—his present path and new life will take its start from here also.

SIDDHARTHA

LESSON 4

Tenderly, he looked into the rushing water, into the transparent green, into the crystal lines of its drawing, so rich in secrets. Bright pearls he saw rising from the deep, quiet bubbles of air floating on the reflecting surface, the blue of the sky being depicted in it. His newly awakened voice was talking again and it told him: Love this water, stay near it, learn from it. Yes, he wanted to learn from it, he wanted to listen to it. He would understand this river, its water and its secrets.

When he reached the ferry, the boat was ready and the same ferryman who had once transported the young Samana across the river stood in the boat. Siddhartha recognised him. "Would you like to ferry me over?" the ferryman asked. The ferryman was astonished to see such an elegant man walking along and on foot, took him into his boat and pushed it off the bank.

"It's a beautiful life you have chosen for yourself," the passenger spoke. "It must be beautiful to live by this water every day and to cruise on it." With a smile, the man at the oar moved from side to side:

"It is beautiful, sir, it is as you say. But isn't every life, isn't every work beautiful?" "This may be true. But I envy you for yours."

"Ah, you would soon stop enjoying it. This is nothing for people wearing fine clothes." Siddhartha laughed. "Once before, I have been looked upon today because of my clothes, I have been looked upon with distrust. Wouldn't you like to accept these clothes, which are a nuisance to me."

"For you must know, I have no money to pay your fare."

"You're joking, sir," the ferryman laughed. "I'm not joking, friend. Behold, once before you have ferried me across this water in your boat for the immaterial reward of a good deed. Thus, do it today as well and accept my clothes for it." "And do you, sir, intend to continue travelling without clothes?"

"Most of all I wouldn't want to continue travelling at all. Most of all I would like you, ferryman, to give me an old loincloth and keep me with you as your assistant, or rather as your trainee, for I'll have to learn first how to handle the boat." For a long time, the

ferryman looked at the stranger, searching.

"Now I recognise you," he finally said. "At one time, you slept in my hut, but this was a long time ago, possibly more than twenty years ago, and you've been ferried across the river by me, and we parted like good friends. Haven't you been a Samana? I can't think of your name any more." "My name is Siddhartha, and I was a Samana when you last saw me."

"So be welcome, Siddhartha. My name is Vasudeva. You will, so I hope, be my guest today as well, sleep in my hut and tell me where you're coming from and why these beautiful clothes are such a nuisance to you."

They had reached the middle of the river and Vasudeva pushed the oar with more strength in order to overcome the current. He worked calmly, his eyes fixed on the front of the boat, with brawny arms.

Siddhartha sat and watched him, and remembered how once before, on that last day of his time as a Samana, love for this man had stirred in his heart.

SIDDHARTHA

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?