



Siddhartha

Hermann Hesse , Hilda Rosner (Translator)

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Herman Hesse's classic novel has delighted, inspired, and influenced generations of readers, writers, and thinkers. In this story of a wealthy Indian Brahmin who casts off a life of privilege to seek spiritual fulfillment. Hesse synthesizes disparate philosophies--Eastern religions, Jungian archetypes, Western individualism--into a unique vision of life as expressed through one man's search for meaning.

Siddhartha Details

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Author : Hermann Hesse , Hilda Rosner (Translator)

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From Reader Review Siddhartha for online ebook

Nandakishore Varma says

Most religions know of it as "Enlightenment" - when the individual transcends himself and sees himself as one with the ultimate reality. It can be theistic (the *Aham Brahma Asmi* - "I am the Brahman" or *Tat Tvam Asi* - "Thou Art That" of Hinduism) or atheistic (the Buddhist Nirvana, based on the *Anatman* - "non-soul"); but the person who achieves it, according to all sources, is caught up in profound rapture. To reach this stage, one has to tread an arduous path. Carl Gustav Jung called the process "individuation": Joseph Campbell called it "the hero's journey". Herman Hesse's eponymous protagonist of *Siddhartha* is a man who embarks on this enterprise.

Siddhartha, the handsome Brahmin youth who apparently has everything, is dissatisfied with life: with the whole pointlessness of it. He leaves home with his friend Govinda and joins a group of ascetics (the Samanas) who have made renunciation a way of life. However, the true seeker he is, Siddhartha finds that simple renunciation does not work for him: he joins the Buddha in pursuit of enlightenment. However, he soon understands that whatever knowledge he must possess, must be experiential.

Leaving Govinda to become a Buddhist ascetic, Siddhartha buries himself in the sensual world across the river, where Kamala the courtesan trains him up in the pleasures of the flesh and Kamaswami the merchant instructs him in the secrets of commerce. Siddhartha soon tires of these too: he returns to the river in penury (not knowing that his child is growing within Kamala), and is taken up by the aged boatman Vasudeva as a helper.

Here, ferrying people across the river, Siddhartha finally attains enlightenment - not from a great teacher, not from years of penance and not even from the kindly Vasudeva (even though he points the way) - but from the river. Kamala's death and his son's abandonment of the stranger father completes his education, as distress turns to peace. Then it's time for Vasudeva, the mentor, to disappear - leaving his student alone with the river.

What the river told Siddhartha

The river flows, and becomes one with the ocean. The vapour from the ocean form into clouds, and descend on the mountains, becoming the river. The river keeps on flowing: it is inconstant, ever-renewing, never the same - yet it is eternal. The river flows, and the river *is*. On its surface, you can see the faces of all your loved ones: whether alive, dead or yet to be born. In the roar of the river, if you listen carefully, you can hear the sacred *AUM* - the first syllable outward, the second one inward, the third one silence...and the fourth one, the all encompassing silence which bears the sound of the cosmic ocean in its womb.

Highly recommended.

Kemper says

So there's a damn dirty hippie in India named Siddhartha who is supposed to be seeking spiritual enlightenment, but instead of going to a good Christian church like a normal person, he wanders around the woods for a while with some other damn dirty hippies. After he meets Buddha, he finally gets tired of being

broke-ass and homeless, and he goes into town where he makes a pile of money. This is good because everyone knows that engaging in capitalism is the only proper way to go through life. As a bonus, he also meets a beautiful woman.

Then, just when he's having a good ole time; doing business, drinking, gambling and making time with the woman, the dang fool's hippie ideas pop up again, and he walks away from all of it. Remember that Chris Farley routine on Saturday Night Live where he'd scream that someone would end up living in a van down by the river? Well, this hippie ends up living in a hut down by the river. And that's even worse, because at least you could play the radio in a van.

Finally, Siddartha thinks that the river is god. Or something stupid like that. It just didn't make any sense. Give me one of them Lee Child novels any day over this hippie dippie crap. That Jack Reacher is a man's man!

Just kidding.

Actually, this is an elegant allegory about a guy going through different phases as he pursues a lifelong quest to rid himself of his ego so that he can know true peace and enlightenment. It's filled with incredible writing, and it's short and smart enough to hold the attention of even a doofus like me. I'd put this in the category of books that everyone should read at least once.

Matthew says

For years, and when I say years it is actually more like decades, I have seen this classic book from time to time but I have never read it. It's not a very long book, but I just never took the time to try it out. One of my Goodreads groups is reading it this month, so I figured that now is as good a time as any to give it a go.

I decided to listen to it and it kind of felt like I was listening to a story around the campfire. The biggest thing it reminded me of was when I was a kid at the museum in Cincinnati hearing Native American legends about how the constellations got in the sky. I am not sure how close to any actual lore Hesse's version is, but it was interesting to listen to.

I saw some comments out there about this book being slow. It certainly isn't action packed and there are many philosophical digressions that move away from the story into a spiritual realm. These parts of the narrative can be slow, but they do add to the atmosphere of Siddartha's journey.

Do I recommend it? If you are really into stories about philosophy and spirituality, yes. If you are into reading all the classics, yes. Otherwise, maybe or maybe not - I can't say for sure.

Agir(????) says

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William2.1 says

Set on the Gangetic Plain some 2,600 years ago, *Siddhartha* is about one man's search for enlightenment. Siddhartha, son of a Brahmin, even in the presence of Gautama Buddha himself, is unable to find a *way* if it depends on the teachings of others. There is, Siddhartha comes to believe, no single illuminated path for all men and women to follow. We must each of us make our own mistakes. We must all suffer, and no warning against it will ever help us. For to live some kind of bizarre life of comfort that prevents suffering also prevents our finding peace. The novel's especially illuminating if you have some understanding of Vedic Religion and how it fed developments in Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. The writing style is very honed, lean, without abstruse digressions. It fulfills for me the fundamental requirement of all good fiction: that it reveal a fully imagined world. And isn't that what we really require from narrative: that it take us out of ourselves; that it, to paraphrase John Gardner (*The Art of Fiction*, *Grendel*, *Mickelsson's Ghosts*, *Nickel Mountain*, *October Light*, etc.), perpetuates the dream? Highly recommended. I much prefer it to *Steppenwolf*. Up next *Journey to the East* and *The Glass Bead Game*.

John says

I taught this book to juniors, and when I did I became frustrated with a student when I introduced it, because he let his classmates know that he'd already read it and it sucked. I'm happy to report, now that we've finished it, that his comments didn't seem to hurt the class's opinion of the book too badly. In fact, that student himself said it was pretty good and that he'd only skimmed it the last time he read it. Lousy kids.... Another student said it was his favorite book that we'd read so far. And that it made him want to quit school and start living. I guess that's praise for the book...

The book is divided pretty neatly into thirds, and that's how we broke it up as a class. The first third is the main character (who is a contemporary of Siddhartha Gotama, the Buddha) as a youth; he is smart and talented and loved by all. He's a prodigy in all things intellectual and religious, but he's not satisfied, he's not happy. So he ends up pursuing a spiritual path through extreme self-deprivation. This part is easy enough for my students, as they're young themselves, and part of Siddhartha's growing up is leaving home and striking out on his own path. They're really (I hope) in much the same circumstance, starting to find a path for themselves that may be independent from their parents.

The second portion of the novel is harder. Siddhartha gives up his ascetic way of life and now indulges in all the pleasures he formerly eschewed. He learns all about sex from a courtesan, he becomes a wealthy

businessman, eventually he becomes a connoisseur of fine food and wine, and a heavy gambler to boot. He loses himself in this life and eventually realizes how unhappy he is. His religious training, of course, always told him that these things were worthless, and he finds that these comforts do not, in fact, make him happy. I figured the students would find this far harder to relate to than I did, but as so often I am, I was wrong. By and large, they seemed to like this section as well as--or better than--the first. Maybe it was all the sex (not that it was even remotely graphic), even though they didn't actually know what a courtesan is. Many of them come from wealthy backgrounds, so maybe they have first-hand experience (sort of) in the ways that wealth isn't really satisfying. Or maybe they've just heard that over and over in our culture, that money doesn't buy happiness. Anyway, they seemed to like it well enough.

The third section was almost certainly a harder sell. It was hard for me to sell myself on it! But Siddhartha leaves his life of luxury, nearly commits suicide over his unhappiness, and ends up becoming a simple (or not-so-simple) ferryman on a river. This section is far more full of more-or-less eastern (a touch of curry: it's eastern-flavored, with strong hints of Nietzsche as well) thought and spirituality. It's tougher to really understand or get into, though the essence isn't that hard: you have to experience things for yourself, and real wisdom can be the result of this experience, but it's not really possible to communicate that wisdom. That's your Reader's Digest condensed version, which I shouldn't even give because it's necessarily a distortion. Read the book if you want to know it. Anyway, to round out my discussion of class discussion, I think the momentum from the earlier parts of the book carried us through, as they seemed to like the book as a whole and liked even the more dense third section as well.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

717. Siddhartha, Herman Hesse

Siddhartha is a novel by Hermann Hesse that deals with the spiritual journey of self-discovery of a man named Siddhartha during the time of the Gautama Buddha. The book, Hesse's ninth novel, was written in German, in a simple, lyrical style. It was published in the U.S. in 1951 and became influential during the 1960s.

Himanshu says

Has it ever happened to you that you are standing, facing a magnificent, breathtaking view, in solitude, and a strong wind hits you in the face? You try to stay still, with eyes closed and then an involuntary smile comes across your face? This book was like that.

Bookdragon Sean says

MY BEST BOOK OF 2017!

In life we all look for meaning, we all look for something to give us a purpose and, in essence, a reason to actually be alive. Nobody wants to get to the end of their journey and realise it was all for nothing, and that their days were utterly wasted. So how do we find this meaning?

“One must find the source within one's own Self, one must possess it. Everything else was seeking -- a detour, an error.”

We must find our own peace. Siddhartha followed the teachings of others and it granted him very little happiness. He meets Buddha, or a Buddha, and he realises that the only way he can achieve the same degree of serenity is to find it himself. The words of the man, as wise as they may be, are just air; they are not experience: they are not one's own wisdom granted through trial. So he takes his own path, albeit an indirect one, and finally awakens his mind into a sense of enlightenment.

But, in order to do so, he must first realise the true state of emptiness. And, of course, to understand emptiness one must first experience temporary fullness; thus, he walks into the world of the everyday man. He indulges in their pleasure, gains possessions and takes a lover. He forms attachments and begets a household of servants and wealth. Through experiencing such things, he learns that they are shallow and transitory; they will never create the feeling of lasting happiness within his soul, so he walks out once more with the full realisation that peace can only come from one place: himself.

“I have had to experience so much stupidity, so many vices, so much error, so much nausea, disillusionment and sorrow, just in order to become a child again and begin anew. I had to experience despair, I had to sink

to the greatest mental depths, to thoughts of suicide, in order to experience grace.”

He experiences oneness with his own thoughts, with everyone else and anything that resides in nature: he becomes enlightened, though only through returning from the darkest of times. Suffering exists, suffering will always exist, and it is how we deal with this suffering that defines us: it is how we pick ourselves up afterwards not letting it ruin our lives, and those around us, that makes us stronger. In this Hesse captures something extremely difficult to put into words, which is something the novel frequently recognises.

How does one accurately define these vague concepts of belief? He doesn't. So we rely on allegories to teach us these ideals, to make us understand that happiness is not equitable with materialism, and to make us realise that seeking something too ardently may mean we miss it altogether. Seeking the meaning of life is not the answer, living life, the life of peace and compassion, is. Siddhartha follows the vibrations of his soul, the sound of the river, and it takes him exactly where he needs to go.

As a student of Buddhism, as a struggling practitioner, I found this book extremely helpful. It cuts through all the rhetoric, the arguments and debates, and gets to the very heart of the matter itself. This is a book I will carry with me through life; this is a book that has so much wisdom to impart, and now the third book to truly impact me individually.

Stephen says

My apologies if this review reeks of "GUSHness." However, it gave me that **ONE-OF-A-KIND** reading experience that doesn't come along often and so I think it is certainly worthy of the praise I shall heap upon it. Beautifully written and a deeply personal story, Hesse has created the ultimate expression of the journey of self-discovery.

The book details the story of Siddhartha, the young and brilliant son of a Brahmin in ancient India. The Brahmin are the uber revered caste comprised of poets, priests, teachers and scholars***.

[*** Quick Side Note : How refreshing is it that their most revered group is not made up of morally questionable athletes, morally suspect celebrities and morally bankrupt politicians...I'm just saying!!]

At the beginning of the story, despite having absorbed all of the teachings of his father and followed all of the religious rites and rituals of his caste, Siddhartha is not content. He knows deep inside that there is something missing and decides to leave his father and his future and seek enlightenment. He sets out, along with his life long friend to find life's meaning. A decision that makes Siddhartha's father less than a happy camper.

Thus begins one of the truly exceptional stories in modern literature. Siddhartha's journey takes him from the elite of his people:

1. First, to a group of ascetics who shun personal possessions and view the physical world as the source of all

pain;

2. Next to a beautiful courtesan who teaches Siddhartha the mysterious of physical love, to a world;
3. Third, to a wealthy trader who teaches Siddhartha about profit, trade and worldly pleasures;
4. Then to a life of hedonistic excess in which Siddhartha eats, drinks, gambles and indulges in numerous sexual conquests in a very SinCityesque way...
5. Finally, back to an ascetic life, but one that embraces the world and everything in it as special and unique.

Throughout the various stages of his journey, Siddhartha finds something of value in everyone he interacts with and each stage brings him closer to his ultimate goal. Through elegant and deeply evocative writing, Hesse demonstrates, through Siddhartha's journey, the fundamental value of each and every person on Earth. Everyone has something special to contribute to the universe. Siddhartha's final realization of his goal of finding enlightenment is simply amazing and one that I can not recommend more strongly that everyone read.

I'm a U.S. citizen of Irish heritage living in Las Vegas. I was raised Roman Catholic and spent most of my undergraduate and graduate academic life learning about western philosophy, history and literature. I mention the only because I was completely floored that I could identify so intensely with Siddhartha's story, despite a background that was as far from embracing an "eastern" viewpoint as you could possibly get.

I think its ability to completely suck me in demonstrates not only the brilliance and beauty of Hesse's prose, but also the universal nature of the story and its ability to transcend all barriers to understanding. It is an amazing read but also a deeply personal one and I think that everyone will get something different out of reading it. Hopefully it is something very, very positive.

5.0 stars. HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

If I could turn back time*or perhaps pass through some portal which brings me face-to-face with my 14-year-old self, there are so many books I would recommend to little me, grabbing my shoulders to shake my malnourished frame and insisting that I get to reading them as soon as effin possible instead of waiting until I'm too old and cynical and hyper-critical to appreciate and relate to what they have to say. If this ever is/was the case, this time-warp, today I would probably see a lot more novels as earth-shattering and brain-splattering magic rather than, well, pretty good stuff that I interrupted much better reading over the last two days to absorb for no good reason save for the mild satisfaction of completing a task.

The main wrong idea I had about this novel--which had quite a bit to do with it taking so long for me to get around to reading it--is that it's specifically about the Buddha. (I don't have to explain the reason for that misconception, right? Cool, moving on.) I thought maybe it was like a biography or some sort of weird Hessian alt-history or, well...honestly, I didn't think about it very far beyond that, and even those assumptions were fuzzily formed and essentially microscopic. Fortunately, Hesse takes his novel in a much more engaging direction by focusing in on a formerly devout and self-restricting member of the Samana movement who falls in love with a real Playboy Bunny™ of a gal, a lusty little obsession which quickly

moves him away from his faith and into her privates. Drugs, drink, gambling, greed, and fornication ensue for years. And years. And years. And years.

Some of you may be familiar with the place he eventually finds himself: remorse, self-hatred, what-if's, what if not's, physical illness, years of wasted time, obsessive reflection i.e. largely pointless yet still horrifyingly circular cap-D Dwelling, nothing to show for your indulgences, spiritually crushing and tooth-grinding depression, et mofuggin' cetera.

Was there still any kind of filth he had not soiled himself with, a 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?

A dark place, no doubt. Unfortunately, this is the point where the book I was at first mildly bored with and then fully engaged in suddenly became just really fucking irritating. Hesse takes the word-slash-concept "Om" and uses it as the ultimate--and probably shortest named--deus ex machina of all time in my personal brain library's dusty archives. After spending unnumbered decades living like Robery Downey Sheen, our protagonist sits by a river for, I dunno, a couple of minutes reciting "Om" before it just miraculously all comes back to him and he's all enlightened and at peace again and shit (this is not even remotely the end of the novel, so please don't spoiler-mark me out of spite). So wait, what? Not for nothin', but if I have even a mildly snaggle-toothed hangover, I practically require endless supplies of coffee and 800mg ibuprofen, an animal and/or person to cuddle with, liquid b12 drops, at least an entire season of some television drama to fall into, and various plush surfaces to flail about on as I frantically loop Stuart Smalley quotes in my head just to keep the demons at bay. Sure, I am not enlightened and I know I sound like a total wimp right now, especially compared to one so self-disciplined as a monk-type, but I'd say his story of basically spending half a lifetime dipped in chocolately booze pools with naked bodies slithering all around him while he passed the glass n' rolled up dollar bill around gives new meaning to the phrase "falling off the wagon." Then again, I guess being at one with the spiritual path *could* be sorta like riding a bike, maybe? I don't suppose my hair turns white from shock every time I hear about an Amish kid returning to his village après Rumspringa. Anyway, my point is that everything just happened so fast and I wasn't ready.

All this nitpicking makes it sound like I didn't like the book, even though I pretty much did. Trite as the whole "setting free the bird" image was (as in, one character literally sets free a bird on the day her lover decides to leave her *because it's symbolic*), my heartstrings did play a purdy song when Siddhartha and his gal split ways, and everything that happened *after* the whole Om Affair did snap me back into the story. I particularly dug the ending, as there was ambiguity in a lot of the right places, and the very last scene was quite lovely. Read it, young me. Read it right after you get the almanac back from Biff. Oh, and speaking of the almanac, you're definitely gonna want to hold on to that thing because, honey, let me tell you a little something about the world economy in the early 21st century...

*Haha, Cher's totally stuck in your head now. Sucker.

Jokoloyo says

Lately, even before I read this book, I was noticing some book opinion that "I-would-like-this-book-better-at-my-younger-age", especially Cecily's review about The Alchemist that I couldn't agree more. I cannot help myself comparing this book with The Alchemist, although Siddharta is the better one. I believe if I read this ten years ago, I could appreciate more about the plot. But there is a Catch-22 situation: ten years ago, I don't know enough to appreciate the Vedic jargons on the book.

The plot is obviously the journey of spiritual enlightenment. Of course I have no issue with The Buddhism (and other Vedic in general) philosophies in the story. If readers interested with the philosophy discussed on this book, there are non-fiction books that discuss them for real.

But the ending, I don't like it. Majority of the book is struggling with philosophy and then the ending... It was such a magical ending without enlightening experience for readers (view spoiler) I felt cheated. I could get more revelation reading a pulp fiction of a murder mystery fiction.

PS: I have an opinion. The plot of Siddharta is basically YA fiction. How come publishers never publish this book as YA fiction with catchy cover art? :P

Sanjay Gautam says

It was the book I read it four years back. And to tell the truth I did not like it much at the time. I thought this guy has written a book for western audience who are not familiar with the 'philosophy of karma and dharma', or rather, in general, the basic philosophy of India, who after reading it will realize something esoteric. And so it seemed to me a book containing wisdom that didn't touch me. **And I finished it with the verdict: contains wisdom, but lacks depth, boring at times, and do not grab your heart, and is not extraordinary in any way. But over the years I've come to understand that it is this ordinary-ness that which makes this work exceptional.** It is the story of common man, just like you and me, who goes through the struggles of life. He is a man who has the qualities that we all, common man, possess, such as: ambition, greed, possessiveness, lust, lying, and etc. And it was one day when I was pondering over the book I came to know that - it was Hermann Hesse's own life that inspired him to write Siddhartha. And it became clear to me: why he has written, the way it is written. Then it dawned on me that it was all realistic happenings that the book pointed and not something esoteric. Even the character Siddhartha, as I came to realize, was as fragile and incomplete & imperfect as me or any common man.

Now I understand, after many years, that Hesse has written from the point of view of a common man, not a protege like Buddha or Adi Shankaracharya. And it is in this light of 'the struggle of a lay man' that this book comes in all its glory. (I mean in terms of wisdom, and not in terms of reading pleasure). And as the time is passing by I'm getting deeper and deeper into this book, and understanding it better.

Highly Recommended!

J.G. Keely says

By the latter part of the 19th Century, the colonial spread of European powers across the world was in full swing. The British ruled India and Australia and had gone to war with China to force opium on the population. Africa, South America, and the Philippines had been portioned out for Western rule and control of resources.

But tyranny does not travel only in one direction, from conqueror to subject. When Medieval European knights returned from the crusades, they brought with them mathematical principles, Greek and Roman texts,

and thus was the European Renaissance kindled by the Light of Islam. Africans were brought to America as slaves, but even being scattered and mistreated did not prevent them from changing the culture, gifting us with blues, jazz, and African-descended words like 'funk', 'mojo', 'boogie', and 'cool'.

It was the same with the colonial powers of the *fin de siècle*, who brought back stories, myths, fashions, art, and philosophies from all over the world. Many Europeans grew obsessed with these foreign religions, finding in them both universal truths of human existence and completely new modes of thought.

Organizations like the Theosophical Society were formed to explore these religions--it was all the rage.

But there was a problem: they got almost all of it wrong.

A Frenchman could spend his entire life learning the intricacies of Greek and Hebrew in order to study Catholicism--its origins, philosophies, schisms, heresies, and history--and still find that, in the end, there is much he does not know, and that he'd made many errors along the way. This, despite the fact that his culture is already steeped in it, he can go and speak to one of hundreds of experts any time he has a question, and has access to a complete library of texts on the subject written in his own language, and by people of a similar culture.

Now, imagine our 19th Century Gascon trying to do the same thing with Buddhism, where not only the original texts on the subject but the histories and analyses are in not merely a foreign language, but a completely different language branch, where the experts are from a different culture and speak a different language, and where the complexity and depth of history are just as vast.

It's no wonder that the Theosophists and similar groups ended up with garbled, mistranslated, simplified versions that combined opposing schools of thought haphazardly. As an old philosophy professor of mine once said: "You can learn a great deal about German Protestantism from reading *Siddhartha*, but almost nothing about Buddhism".

What ultimately emerged from the Theosophist movement was not a branch of Western Buddhism, but the 'New Age Movement': a grab bag of the same old Western ideas dressed up as mystical Oriental wisdom. Indeed, the central idea of the inane self-help book 'The Secret' and of *Siddhartha* are the same: the 'Law of Attraction', which is not a Buddhist principle.

Like most of Hesse's work, it belongs in the 'Spiritual Self-Help' section, where vague handwaving and knowing looks are held in higher esteem than thought or insight. It's the same nonspecific mysticism he shows us in *The Journey To The East* and *The Glass Bead Game*, where the benefits of wisdom are indistinguishable from the symptoms of profound dementia.

If you want to understand Buddhism, start somewhere else, because you'd just have to unlearn all of Hesse's incorrect arguments and definitions. Happily, we have come a long way since Hesse's time, with experts and commentaries in many different languages available to the avid student. But, if you'd like to see someone try to explain the principles of Lutheranism using only misused Hindu terms, this may be the book for you.

Michelle says

Whatever. Blah blah blah Samana. Blah blah blah Kamala. Blah blah blah Samsara. Blah blah blah River. Blah blah blah Om.

