

## Notes on *Siddhartha*

### Important Concepts

**veil of Maya:** the sensory world; individual phenomena; perception of physical and temporal separation

- considered to be an illusion that distracts people from seeing and understanding true reality, the underlying unity of all things
- all suffering is a result of existing in this state of illusion

**Samsara:** the cycle of rebirth caused by a failure to pierce the veil of Maya and achieve Nirvana (also used in the novel to refer to the illusory world of phenomena and the spiritual state of those who are trapped in that world)

**Nirvana:** enlightenment; a state of inner peace and contentment caused by the extinguishing of desires and passions

- implies the end of suffering through freeing the mind from attachment
- considered “the highest happiness,” a kind of transcendental happiness different from temporary joy or pleasure
- literally means “extinction” or “extinguishing”
- one who has achieved Nirvana will escape the cycle of rebirth

**the Self:** individual soul; sense of separate, individual identity that leads to attachment, desires, suffering

**Atman, the True Self:** the Self that is common to all living things, the “World Soul”

**Brahman:** the “unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent reality that is the Divine Ground of all being in this universe” (Wikipedia)

**Brahmin:** a educated person of the highest caste; usually a priest

### Themes and Motifs

- suffering as an inherent part of the human condition; the desire to escape suffering as central
- the importance of patience and acceptance: letting things happen naturally instead of trying to force them to happen a certain way
- the need to find one’s own path: enlightenment cannot come simply from accepting the teachings of others
- selfless love vs. selfish love
- the futility of seeking; the immanence and omnipresence of the sacred and the beautiful
- the necessity and inevitability of suffering, foolishness, immorality, etc.
- the cyclical nature of life; repetition of all things; death and renewal
- time as an illusion; separation as an illusion
- contradiction/paradox: seeking is both necessary and futile; sin is both bad and good
- the limitations of language: enlightenment can only be felt, not taught
- appearance vs. reality
- enlightenment: not a path or a goal, but a constant realization
- corrupting effect of power and materialism

[continued on reverse]

## Symbols

- the river: illusion of time, unity of all things, freedom; boundary between worlds; cycle of repetition and renewal; spiritual self-reflection
  - paradox: constantly changing, yet constantly the same
  - perpendicular movement of current (as opposed to seekers' movement in the story) symbolizes realization of what is always there, the illusion of time?—the goal is in the present, not the future
  - connection to the River Styx?
- bodhi tree: patience; eternity
- ferryboat: physical body (vessel of soul on journey to enlightenment?)
- ferryman: spiritual mentor, teacher, guide
- Om: unity of diverse things
- groves/gardens: the sensory/sensual world and its pleasures, but also life and renewal
- stars: guides/mentors; profound loneliness; spiritual freedom, independence, and superiority
- (falling) leaves: the opposite of stars; people who aren't spiritually independent
- inner voice: guiding instincts about one's spiritual needs
- breasts/breast milk, figs, lotuses, perfume, spices, lips: sensuality and sensory pleasures
- bird: the voice of the soul (the inner voice)
- birth/awakening: spiritual renewal or reinvigoration
- death: spiritual change; the passing away of desires
- sleep: oblivion; death; preparation for spiritual renewal or change
- dreams: deep-seated desires and instincts
- wheel: change; transitoriness
- children: openness, energy, lightheartedness, humor sense of wonder, freedom, innocence, simplicity; wisdom as opposed to knowledge