

***Siddhartha* Study Questions**

Prefatory Question: In what sense are desire and attachment the roots of human suffering? (In other words, how do our desires cause us to suffer?) Keep this question in mind as you read.

Chapter 1: “The Brahmin’s Son”

1. Describe Siddhartha. Why is he unhappy despite his great fortune in life? How does he feel about the Brahmins’ knowledge? Why does he decide to leave his Brahmin life?
2. Describe Govinda. Why is he so devoted to Siddhartha?
3. How does Siddhartha convince his father to let him become a Samana, and why does he choose this way of persuading his father? (Hint: “Siddhartha has always obeyed his father...Siddhartha will do what his father tells him.”)

Chapter 2: “With the Samanas”

1. Describe the life of a Samana. Why do they choose this kind of lifestyle? Explain the goal of their lifestyle and practices.
2. What attitude toward most people does Siddhartha develop after becoming a Samana, and why?
3. What does Siddhartha mean when he says, “What I have so far learned from the Samanas, I could have learned more quickly and easily in every inn in a prostitute’s quarter, amongst the carriers and dice players”? Why does he decide to leave his life as a Samana? (Consider his comment to Govinda that he has no desire to walk on water.)

Chapter 3: “Gotama”

1. What characteristics does Gotama have that make him remarkable? Why is his voice compared to “a star in the heavens”?
2. Why does Gotama warn Siddhartha about “the thicket of opinions and the conflict of words” and having “too much cleverness”? Why does he imply that the apparent flaw in his teachings that Siddhartha has found is not important?
3. What does Siddhartha think of Gotama? Why does Siddhartha decide not to join his followers? What gift does he think Gotama has given him, and what does he mean by this?

Chapter 4: “Awakening”

1. What does Siddhartha decide to do after leaving Gotama and Govinda, and why? Relate this decision to the title of the chapter. What feelings does he have after making this decision? In what way is his decision frightening?
2. What new philosophy does Siddhartha have about the nature of the world, and how is his experience of the world different? (Refer also to the beginning of Chapter 5.)

Chapter 5: “Kamala”

1. In what way is Siddhartha now like a child? What is the “voice” that he resolves to obey?
2. Why do you think Siddhartha rejects the young woman who propositions him?

3. Describe Kamala. How does Siddhartha's decision to win Kamala's favor and become her student reflect his new philosophy? Why does he say that he will never again lower his eyes when he meets a beautiful woman?

4. What is Siddhartha's attitude toward the new world of money, material goods, and sensory pleasures he has decided to embrace?

5. How would you explain Siddhartha's remarkable ability to attain whatever he sets out to attain? What skills does Siddhartha value, and how are they useful? (Refer also to Siddhartha's interview with Kamaswami in Chapter 6.)

Chapter 6: "Amongst the People"

1. What is Siddhartha's initial attitude toward business? Why is it a good attitude for a businessman to have—in what ways does it benefit Siddhartha?

2. How might the lessons Kamala teaches Siddhartha be applicable to the goal of living a good life—in other words, what moral or spiritual elements do her teachings contain?

3. Describe Siddhartha's priorities, attitude toward business, and treatment of others. Relate this process to the title of the chapter. What bothers him about the way he is living? In what sense does he feel that he and Kamala are different from other people, and what exactly does he mean by this?

Chapter 7: "Samsara"

1. How does Siddhartha change after years of life as a merchant, and why? What does he envy about other people? What is "the soul sickness of the rich"? Why does Siddhartha become so deeply attracted to gambling?

2. What does the dead bird in Siddhartha's dream represent? What does he realize is the source of the happiness he has sometimes felt? Why does he decide to leave his life as a merchant?

Chapter 8: "By the River"

1. What saves Siddhartha from killing himself, and what does it represent? How is his long, dreamless sleep symbolically significant?

2. How is it symbolically appropriate that Siddhartha again finds himself at the river after leaving his life as a merchant? How is it significant that instead of crossing the river, he stays at the river this time?

3. What conclusions does Siddhartha come to about the reasons for his strange path in life? In what sense has his "Self" died, and what has made this possible?

Chapter 9: "The Ferryman"

1. Describe Vasudeva. Why do you think he welcomes Siddhartha as his assistant?

2. What does it mean to be a good listener? Why is listening spiritually profound, and how is it helpful? (Refer also to Chapter 11.) Why do you think Vasudeva is "no friend of words"?

3. What do you think it means that "the river knows everything"? What is ironic about most people's attitude toward the river?

4. What lessons does Siddhartha learn from the river, and what things does it symbolize?

5. What do you think “emanates” from Siddhartha and Vasudeva that compels some people to talk with them? Why do you think they are not recognized as wise men by the seekers who come looking for them?

6. What change do you think Kamala sees in Siddhartha’s eyes?

Chapter 10: “The Son”

1. Describe Siddhartha’s son. How does Siddhartha treat him, and why? Why do you think Siddhartha “prefer[s] the sorrow and trouble of his love rather than happiness and pleasure without the boy”?

2. What insight does Vasudeva offer Siddhartha about why Siddhartha’s way of trying to win him over only makes the situation worse? What does he think of Siddhartha’s desire to teach and protect his son, and why?

3. What do you think makes Siddhartha fully realize and accept that his desire to protect his son is foolish?

4. What important role does Siddhartha’s son play in the novel? How is it appropriate that he leaves Siddhartha and does not return, and how is it ironic that Siddhartha tries to keep his son with him? What theme(s) do you think this expresses? (Refer also to the first few pages of Chapter 11.)

Chapter 11: “Om”

1. How has Siddhartha changed, and how does this change make enlightenment possible for him?

2. In what ways is being a good listener closely related to enlightenment?

3. Why do you think Vasudeva chooses this particular time to leave Siddhartha and go off to his death?

Chapter 12: “Govinda”

1. What does Siddhartha tell Govinda about the nature of seeking, and what does this imply about the nature of enlightenment? Why do you think this lesson is so difficult to learn?

2. Why do you think Siddhartha says that “wisdom is not communicable”?

3. Why does Siddhartha think that time is an illusion and that “everything that exists is good”?

4. What is the difference between what most people call love (what even Gotama refers to as love) and the love that Siddhartha feels is “the most important thing in the world”?

Review Questions:

1. Why do you think Siddhartha never even considers the possibility of going back to his family?

2. What is primary conflict in the novel, and how is it resolved?

3. “A true seeker could not accept any teachings; not if he sincerely wished to find something. But he who had found, could give his approval to every path, every goal; nothing separated him from all the other thousands who lived in eternity, who breathed the divine.” Discuss how this quote succinctly expresses some of the book’s ideas about enlightenment.

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4. In Chapter 8, Siddhartha thinks of his former life as “that soft, well-upholstered hell.” What does this description reveal about the nature of “hell” for someone seeking spiritual salvation or enlightenment?
5. Why is Siddhartha’s long journey necessary before he can achieve enlightenment, and what things does this suggest about the nature of enlightenment?
6. Describe the ancient Indian society in which Siddhartha lives as it is portrayed in the book. In what ways is it different from modern American society, and in what ways is it similar?
7. One of the most distinctive characteristics of the novel’s plot is its use of coincidence. Why do you think Hesse chose to structure the story in this way, and what theme(s) does it suggest?
8. Describe the style of the narration—the narrator’s diction, sentence structure, dialogue, descriptions, and use of literary devices. How is it an appropriate style for the story?