

# SIDDHARTHA

by Hermann Hesse

PRESTWICK HOUSE LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS



UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

# SIDDHARTHA



H e r m a n n   H e s s e



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# SIDDHARTHA

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# Notes

## **What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?**

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

Hermann Hesse was born in Calw, Germany, in 1877. He visited India in 1911; it was most likely this visit that formed the basis for the novel *Siddhartha*, first published in 1922. Hesse immigrated to Switzerland in 1912 and became a Swiss citizen about a decade later. He was strongly opposed to the militarism of Germany during both World Wars, and in 1943, the Nazis would not allow the publication of one of his most famous novels—*The Glass Bead Game*, which was then published in Zürich. Hesse won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1946, and wrote no other major works after receiving this prize. Hermann Hesse died in 1962.

# Pointers

## READING POINTERS

### Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

*Siddhartha* is a novel about how a member of the priest class in India attains enlightenment over the course of his life. During the novel, Siddhartha becomes an ascetic, a merchant, and then a ferryman. It is important to note that, in terms of the book's chronology, Siddhartha spends much of his adult life (twenty years or more) as a merchant pursuing hedonistic pleasures. It is only later in life that he returns to the spiritual quest for enlightenment that he began as a young man. Large sections of time in Siddhartha's life are glossed over or skipped altogether during the narration.

Note the following themes and concepts that Hesse portrays and deals with as Siddhartha goes through his life experiences:

- One cannot be taught the path to enlightenment by someone else. Enlightenment can be attained only through a personal search for experiential wisdom. Paths to enlightenment can be as varied as the people who are seeking it because each journey toward that enlightenment is different.
- Endless words, teachings, and searches for knowledge can distract one from enlightenment. In addition, most worldly desires will stifle spiritual growth.
- All life and all matter is part of one unbroken, united whole. Time is an illusion, and the matter that was once non-life may become life. Existence, being, and life itself, therefore, are part of everything because all things actually exist simultaneously. If time itself is illusory, as Hesse puts forth in the novel, the young Siddhartha, searching for the divine, the older Siddhartha, feeding upon his desires, and the mature Siddhartha, living with the divine, all exist simultaneously.



## *The Son of the Brahmin* †

**S**IDDHARTHA, the handsome son of the Brahmin, the young falcon, grew up together with his friend Govinda, another Brahmin's son, in the shadow of the house, in the sun of the riverbank near the boats, in the shadow of the sala<sup>†</sup> forest, and in the shadow of the fig trees. The sun tanned his fair shoulders on the riverbank while he bathed, during the holy cleansing, at the holy sacrifices. Shadows flowed into his black eyes in the mango grove, during the boyish games, when his mother sang, at the holy sacrifices, during the teaching of his father the scholar, and when speaking with the wise ones. For a long time Siddhartha had taken part in the wise ones' discussions; he had practiced word-wrestling with Govinda, had practiced the art of contemplation and the duty of meditation with Govinda. He already understood how to speak the "Om"<sup>†</sup> silently, that word of words, how to speak it silently in his inner being as he inhaled, how to pronounce it silently out of himself as he exhaled, how to do so with his whole soul while his forehead was enveloped by the radiance of the clear-thinking mind. He already understood how to recognize Atman<sup>†</sup> within this inner essence of his that was indestructible and one with the universe.

Joy sprang up in his father's heart over the son who was so apt to learn and so thirsty after knowledge; he saw growing within him a great sage and priest, a prince among the Brahmins.

Delight welled up in his mother's heart when she saw him taking long

<sup>†</sup>Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

cable manners.

All the young daughters of the Brahmins felt love stirring within their hearts when Siddhartha walked through the side-streets of the city with a beaming face, a lean physique, and a royal look in his eyes.

Govinda, the Brahmin's son, however, loved him more than all of these. He loved the eye of Siddhartha and his sweet voice, his gait and the perfection of his movements; he loved everything that Siddhartha did and said, and above all he loved Siddhartha's mind, his sublime and fiery thoughts, his blazing will, and Siddhartha's high calling. Govinda knew that this would be no ordinary Brahmin, no lazy official presiding over the sacrifices, no money-grubbing merchant hawking magic trinkets, no vain and vacuous speaker, no wicked and lying priest, and also not a good-hearted but dim-witted sheep in the plebian herds. Govinda didn't want to be such a person either, didn't want to be a Brahmin like all the ten thousand other Brahmins. He wanted to follow Siddhartha, who was beloved and majestic. When Siddhartha first became a god, when he entered into the radiance, then Govinda wanted to follow him as his friend, his escort, his servant, his spear-carrier, and his shadow.

In this manner, everyone loved Siddhartha. He brought everyone joy; he pleased everyone.

However, Siddhartha didn't bring himself joy; he didn't please himself. He strolled on the rosy paths of the fig gardens, sat in the blue shadows of the grove of meditation, washed his limbs daily in baths of atonement, and sacrificed in the deep shadows of the mango forest. Everyone loved him; he was joyous to them, and yet he carried no joy in his own heart. Dreams and restless thoughts came flowing to him out of the river's water, twinkled to him from the stars of the night, melted out of the sunbeams. Dreams and anxiety came billowing out of the sacrificial smoke, whispering from the verses of the Rig-Veda,<sup>†</sup> or trickling out of the old Brahmin's teachings.

Siddhartha had started to cultivate the seed of discontent within himself. He had started to feel as if his father's love, his mother's love, and the love of his friend Govinda wouldn't make him happy forever, wouldn't bring him peace, satisfy him, and be sufficient for all time. He had started to suspect that his illustrious father, his other teachers, and the wise Brahmins had shared the majority and the best of their wisdom with him, that they had already poured their all into his ready vessel without filling the vessel: the mind wasn't satisfied, the soul wasn't quiet, the heart wasn't stilled. The purifications were nice, but they were just water, and didn't wash away sins; they didn't cure the mental thirst or allay his heart's anxiety. Sacrifices and invocations to the gods were superb—but were they sufficient? Did the sacrifices bring happiness? And what about all those gods?



Was Prajapati<sup>†</sup> really the one who had created the world? Wasn't it Atman, He who was the Only One, the All-One? Weren't the gods creatures, created just as you and I were: subject to time and transitory? Was it even good, was it right, did it make sense or was it important to sacrifice to the gods? To whom else would one sacrifice, to whom else should one bring worship other than Him, the Only, the Atman? And where could Atman be found, where did he live, where did his eternal heart beat—where else other than in the self, in one's inner being, in the indestructible part of all persons that they carried within themselves? But where was this self, where was this inner being, this most paramount thing? It was not made of flesh or the legs that carried it, it wasn't just the thoughts or the awareness—or so taught the wisest men. Where then was it? One had to penetrate that far into the self, into myself, into the Atman—was there some other way, however, a search which still yielded worthwhile results? Ah, but nobody pointed to this way, nobody knew it: not father, not the teachers and wise ones, not the holy chants sung during sacrifices! They knew everything, those Brahmins and their holy books. They knew everything, they had concerned themselves with everything and with more than everything: the creation of the world, the origins of language, of foods, of inhalation and exhalation, the institution of the senses, the deeds of the gods—they knew an inordinate amount, and yet was it worthwhile to know everything like this when one didn't know the one and only thing that was most important—that which alone was important?

To be sure, many verses from the holy books—especially the Upanishads<sup>†</sup> of the Sama-Veda<sup>†</sup>—spoke about these innermost and most important things—majestic verses. “Your soul is the whole world” was written there; it was also written that the person who slept in the deepest slumber went within to his or her innermost place and lived in Atman. Wonderful wisdom stood within these verses, all the wisdom of the wisest was gathered there in the magical words, pure like the honey gathered by the bees. No, the behemoth of knowledge that innumerable generations of wise Brahmins had gathered and protected there wasn't to be lightly esteemed. But where were the Brahmins, where were the priests, the wise ones and the penitents—those who were successful not only in knowing this deepest wisdom but also in living it? Where were the elders who could merge this Atman of their dreams with the waking being, to bring it fully into their lives and into their words and deeds? Siddhartha knew many venerable Brahmins—not the least of whom was his father, who was pure, scholarly, and highly esteemed. His father was admirable: his habits were quiet and elegant, his life pure, his words wise, and the thoughts that inhabited his brow were both fine and noble—but did he who possessed

so much wisdom live a blessed life? Did he have joy; wasn't he also a mere seeker, one who had thirst? Did not he, who had thirst, have to receive a holy quenching of this thirst by drinking time and time again at the sacrifices, at the books, at the conversations of the Brahmins? Why did he, who was irreproachable, have to wash out his sins every day, have to expend great effort once more to attain purification each and every day. Wasn't Atman in him; didn't the ancient spring flow in his heart? The ancient spring must be found in one's own self; one must own it! Everything else was just a search, a detour; it was to go astray.

Thus went Siddhartha's thoughts; this was his thirst, his sorrow.

He often spoke to himself out of the Chandogya-Upanishad: "Verily, the name of the Brahman† is Satyam†— in truth, one who knows this enters daily into the heavenly world." This heavenly world often appeared close, but he had never totally reached it; never had he quenched the ultimate thirst. Furthermore, among all the wise ones whom he knew whose teaching he had savored—even the wisest—among them all there were none who had totally reached the heavenly world, who had completely quenched the eternal thirst.

"Govinda," said Siddhartha to his friend, "Govinda, beloved, come with me among the Banyan trees, and we will practice meditating."

They went to the Banyan trees and sat down: here Siddhartha, and Govinda twenty paces further. When Siddhartha sat down, ready to speak the Om, he murmured and repeated the verse:

"Om is the bow; the arrow is the soul,  
The Brahman is the arrow's goal  
That one should continuously hit."

When the usual time for practicing meditation had passed, Govinda rose up. The twilight had come, and it was time to perform the cleansing of the evening hour. He called Siddhartha's name. Siddhartha gave no answer. Siddhartha sat with his eyes open, immersed, staring with his eyes fixed upon a very far goal; the tip of his tongue stuck out a little between his teeth, and he didn't appear to be breathing. Thus he sat, shrouded in meditation, thinking Om, his soul sent out like an arrow after the Brahman.

Once, the Samanas† pulled through Siddhartha's town. They were pilgrims and ascetics: three scraggly, worn-out men who were neither old nor young, with dusty and bloody shoulders. They were nearly naked, singed by the sun, given over to loneliness, strangers and enemies of the world, and estranged, gaunt jackals in the domain of mankind. From behind them wafted a hot scent of quiet passion, of a duty that destroys, of a merciless

## Glossary

### First Part

#### The Son of the Brahmin

**Brahmin** – the class of priests in Hindu society; a member of this society. This class is the highest of the four Hindu castes (see note: *caste* in “With the Samanas” glossary).

**sala** – a type of hardwood tree with resin that is used for incense, for caulking boats, and for lamp fuel; it is said that the Buddha died underneath one of these trees.

“**Om**” – a mystical, religious Hindu word, which is said to embody the universal spirit; it is a word regularly chanted during religious ceremonies to achieve a state of bliss.

**Atman** – [*Sanskrit*] “breath”; “individual soul”

**Rig-Veda** – the oldest religious scripture in the Hindu religion; this is the holiest of the four Hindu texts written between 1500 and 500 B.C. *Veda* refers to the collection of texts or verses that creates a body of knowledge from the original time period of the Hindu religion.

**Prajapati** – [*Sanskrit*] “author/protector of life”

**Upanishads** – a set of texts, the name of which indicates that it supposedly “removes ignorance by revealing knowledge of the universal spirit.”

**Sama-Veda** – [*Sanskrit*] *Sama* means “ritual chant,” and *Veda* means “knowledge”; the Sama-Veda (Samaveda) ranks third in level of importance in the four Hindu scriptures.

**Brahman** – related to the expansion of the soul that leads to knowledge of the universal spirit; it also refers to the spirit itself that sustains the universe. Note that *Brahman* is not the same as *Brahmin* (see note: *Brahmin*).

**Satyam** – [*Sanskrit*] “pure,” “true”; that which lies beyond the illusion of the world.

**Samanas** – [*Sanskrit*] “to become weary or exhausted through effort”; in this context, the term is referring to those people who embody this attribute and practice severe self-discipline and self-denial.

#### With the Samanas

**Nirvana** – Nirvana represents a state of bliss that supposedly occurs when all personal desires have been eliminated, one’s individual self is extinguished, and a person realizes that the soul and the universal spirit are one and the same.

## Vocabulary

### First Part

#### The Son of the Brahmin

**allay** – to calm, alleviate

**ascetics** – people who practice self-denial to attain spiritual strength

**gaunt** – thin and slender, sometimes due to malnourishment

**hawking** – selling or advertising by shouting loudly in public places

**illustrious** – famous, brilliant, or dignified

**plebian** – of or relating to the lower class

**raffia** – a type of palm tree that gives fibers suitable for weaving

**Sanskrit** – the ancient language of India and Hinduism; all the Hindu Vedas (scriptures) were originally written in Sanskrit.

**vacuous** – shallow and devoid of intelligence

**venerable** – worthy of honor or respect

#### With the Samanas

**adulation** – adoration, reverence

**anesthetic** – a substance used to make one numb and/or drowsy

**carrion** – rotting flesh that is fed upon by animals

**causality** – the relationship between a cause and its effect

**clarion** – very clear and loud

**decorum** – proper and appropriate behavior or manners

**dissolution** – disintegration; destruction

**feigned** – pretended or gave the appearance of

**gleaned** – gathered

**ineffable** – indescribable; unable to be put into words

**languished** – became weak, faint, or discouraged

**reciprocated** – repaid; returned an action in kind and degree

**sublime** – of or belonging to an exalted spiritual state

**tutelage** – teaching, influence, guidance

**visage** – one's face; a facial expression

**wafted** – drifted on the air (usually in reference to odors)

**zealous** – fervent, passionate

#### Gotama

**equanimity** – remaining calm under stress

**gait** – a way of walking

**imperceptible** – unable to be sensed or seen

**inscrutable** – difficult to understand

**insubstantial** – lacking substance or significance; unimportant