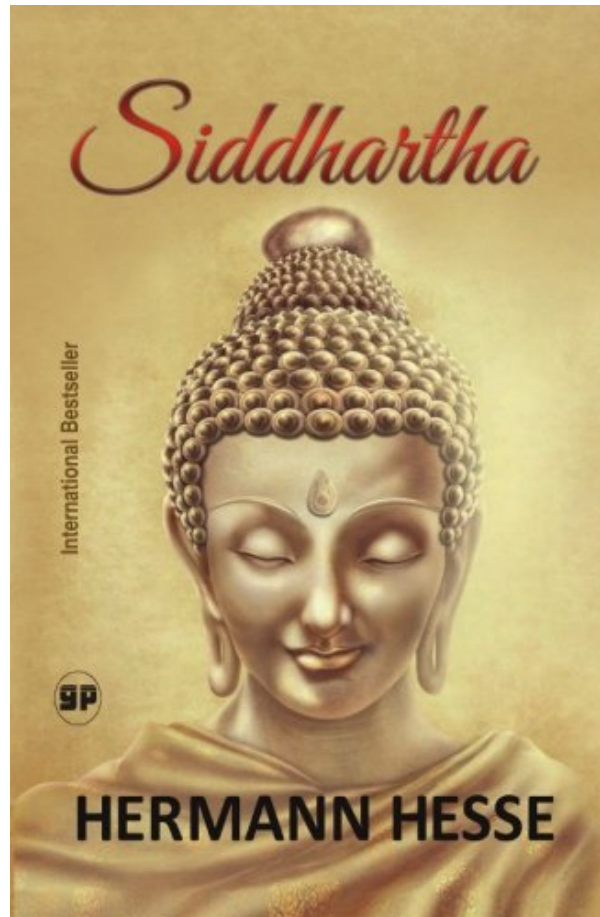
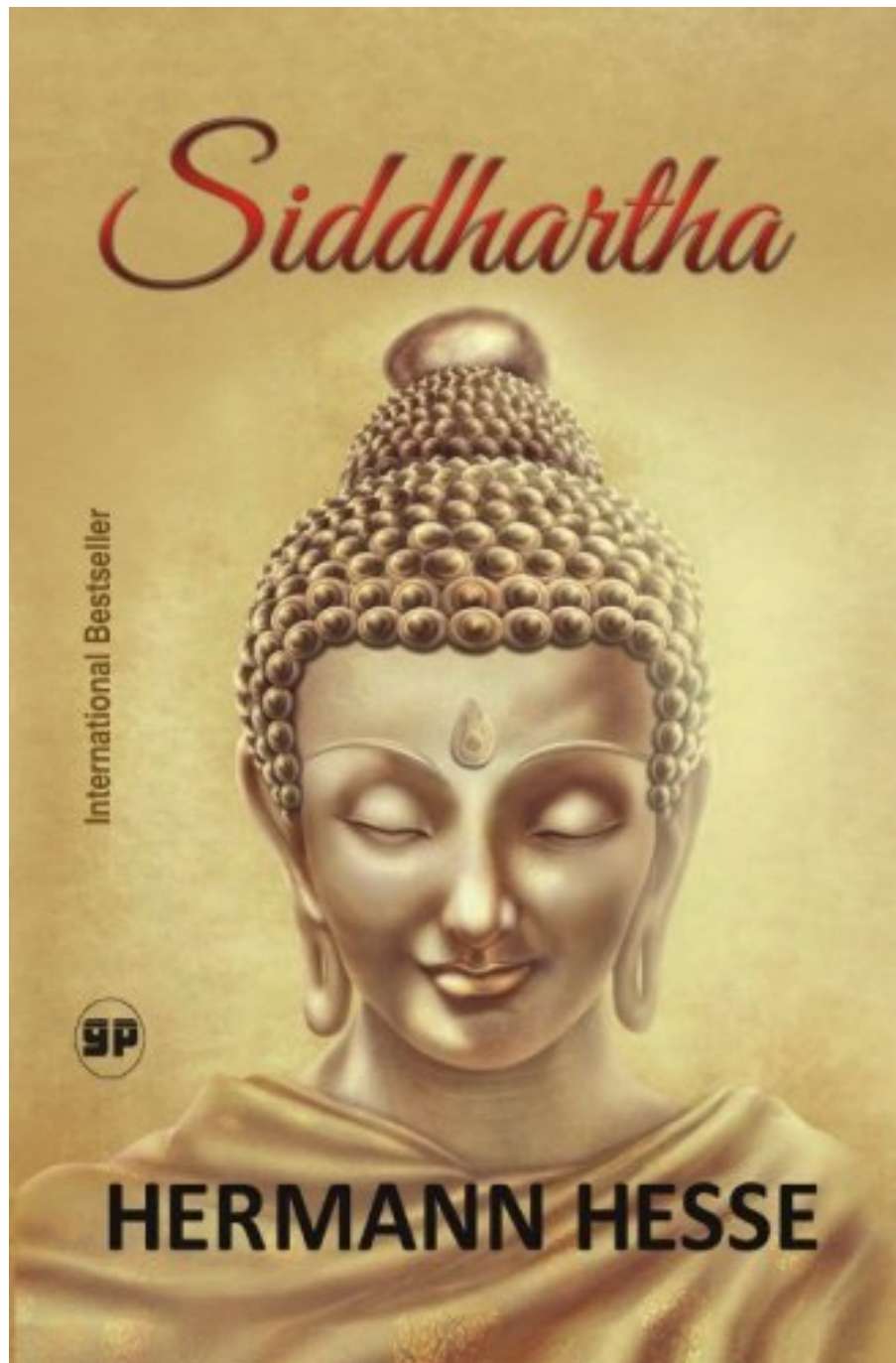


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This title was originally written in German, in a simple, yet powerful and lyrical style. It was first published in the year 1922 after Hesse had spent some time in India in the 1910s. The story revolves around a young Indian man who leaves his home and family in search for meaning and truth. The spiritual quest takes him from the austerities of renunciation to the profligacy of prosperity. It makes him experience a wide range of human experiences - from hunger and want to passion, pleasure, pain, greed, yearning, boredom, love, despair and hope. The journey ultimately leads him to the river, where he gains peace and eventually wisdom.

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- Binding: Paperback
- 168 pages

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100 of 100 people found the following review helpful.

new rendition of timeless tale

By Joseph H. Hartmann

Beautifully translated, evoking the majesty in the simple story of a man in his lifelong journey towards the attainment of Enlightenment. Melodic in its tone but true to the original German Susan Bernofsky's translation has set a new standard among the various English translations currently available. As many times as I have read and enjoyed Siddhartha over the years (about 10 or so readings) never have I enjoyed a translation as much as Ms. Bernofsky's - a truly remarkable effort.

199 of 212 people found the following review helpful.

A Mystical Look at a Universal Problem

By A Customer

Set in India, Siddhartha is subtitled an "Indic Poetic Work" and clearly it does owe much to both Buddhism and Hinduism, however the philosophy embodied in Siddhartha is both unique and quite complex, despite the lyrically beautiful simplicity of the plot.

Siddhartha is one of the names of the historical Gautama and while the life of Hesse's character resembles that of his historical counterpart to some extent, Siddhartha is by no means a fictional life of Buddha and his teachings.

Siddhartha is divided into two parts of four and eight chapters, something some have interpreted as an illustration of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment.

Elements of Hinduism can also be found in Siddhartha. Some critics maintain that Hesse was influenced largely by the Bhagavad Gita when he wrote the book and that his protagonist was groping his way along a path outlined in that text. Certainly the central problems of Siddhartha and the Gita are similar: how can the protagonist attain a state of happiness and serenity by means of a long and arduous path?

Hesse's protagonist, however, seeks his own personal path to fulfillment, not someone else's. It is one of trial and error and he is only subconsciously aware of its nature. Although many see Siddhartha's quest as

embodying the ideals of Buddhism, Siddhartha objects to the negative aspects of Gautama's teaching. He rejects Gautama's model for himself and he rejects Buddhism; Siddhartha insists upon the right to choose his own path to fulfillment.

The primary theme of Siddhartha is the individual's difficult and lonely search for self-fulfillment. Both the means used by the hero in his quest and the nature of his fulfillment are of prime importance and reflect recurring themes that thread their way through all of Hesse's work.

Although Siddhartha listens with great respect to the words of Buddha and does not reject Buddhism as being right for others, he, himself, does not become Buddha's disciple, but decides to pursue his goal through his own effort, not by following a teacher. As in *Demian*, Nietzsche's influence is apparent; the reader is strongly reminded of Nietzsche's Zarathustra who exhorts his listeners not to follow him, but to excel themselves.

Siddhartha's sense of fulfillment is a mystical one and cannot be defined with precision. In this respect, it resembles the Nirvana of Buddhism. The most important aspect of Siddhartha's growing awareness, however, is an unselfish and undirected love.

The division of the world into the two opposing poles of masculine and feminine is another common theme in Hesse's writings. The Father World, or masculine, is dominated by the intellect, reason, spirit, stability and discipline; the Mother World, or feminine, by emotion, love, fertility, birth, death, fluidity, nature and the senses.

While this symbolism is more pronounced in other works, such as *Demian* and *The Glass Bead Game*, it is also present and consistently developed in *Siddhartha*.

Siddhartha's position vis-a-vis the two worlds changes during the course of the novel. At times, he seems to embrace one world more than the other; at other times he unites the virtues of each.

Two symbolic elements thread their way through *Siddhartha*; that of the river and that of a smile. Suggestive of fluidity as well as the paradoxical union of permanence and flux, the river is an age-old symbol of eternity and spiritual communion.

A second important symbol in *Siddhartha* is that of the smile. The characters in the story who attain a final state of complete serenity are each characterized by a beautiful smile reflecting a peaceful and harmonious state of being.

Each of these symbols is associated with Siddhartha at key junctures in his quest.

Siddhartha is written in an extremely simple style, in keeping with the inherent simplicity of the plot, theme and general tone of the book. The syntax is uncomplicated and except for a few technical terms from Indian philosophy, the vocabulary is straightforward. Frequent use is made of leitmotifs, parallelism and repetition and, in the original German, the language is rhythmic and lyrical, reminiscent of a poetic religious text with a definite meditative quality.

Siddhartha is told by an omniscient third person narrator with frequent direct and indirect quotations of the words and thoughts of various characters, especially Siddhartha. The narrator, almost invariably, looks at things from Siddhartha's perspective, and even when other characters are discussed or quoted, it is always to shed light on Siddhartha, himself.

A mystical and lyrical book, *Siddhartha* is a beautiful story of a truly personal quest towards the self-fulfillment we all must strive to attain.

186 of 199 people found the following review helpful.

All Is Connected

By Donald Mitchell

Siddhartha is that most unusual of all stories -- one that follows a character throughout most of his life . . . and describes that life in terms of a spiritual journey. For those who are ready to think about what their spiritual journey can be, *Siddhartha* will be a revelation. For those who are not yet looking for "enlightenment," the book will seem peculiar, odd, and out-of-joint. That's because Hesse was presenting a mystery story, also, for each reader to solve for herself or himself. The mystery is simply to unravel the

meaning of life.

As the son of a Brahmin, Siddhartha would naturally have enjoyed access to all of the finest lessons and things of life. Knowing of his natural superiority in many ways, he becomes disenchanted with teachers and his companions. In a burst of independence, he insists on being allowed to leave home to become a wandering Shramana (or Samana, depending on which translation you read). After three years or so, he tires of this as well. Near the end of that part of his life, Siddhartha meets Gotama, the Buddha, and admires him greatly. But Siddhartha continues to feel that teachers cannot convey the wisdom of what they know. Words are too fragile a vessel for that purpose. He sees a beautiful courtesan and asks her to teach him about love. Thus, Siddhartha begins his third quest for meaning by embracing the ordinary life that most people experience. Eventually, disgusted by this (and he does behave disgustingly), he tires of life. Then, he suddenly reconnects with the Universe, and decides to become a ferryman and learn from the river. In this fourth stage of his life, he comes to develop the wisdom to match the knowledge that direct experiences of the "good" and the "sensual" life have provided to him.

Few will find Siddhartha to be an attractive character until near the end of the book. Hesse is trying to portray his path towards balance and understanding by emphasizing Siddhartha's weaknesses and errors. But, these are mostly errors that all people fall into. Hesse wants us to see that we make too much of any given moment or event. The "all" in a timeless sense is what we should seek for.

There is a wonderful description of what a rock is near the end of the book that is well worth reading, even if you get nothing out of the rest of the story. The "mystery" of what Gotama experiences when he kisses Siddhartha's forehead will provide many interesting questions for each reader to consider.

I recommend that you both listen to this book on tape and read it. Hesse's approach to learning is for us to observe and feel. You will do more of that while listening than by simply reading. I was able to find an unabridged audio tape in our library for my listening. I encourage you to go with an unabridged tape as well. You will get more out of Siddhartha that way. I read the Hilda Rosner translation, and liked it very much.

After you finish listening to and reading the book, I suggest that you think about what you have not yet experienced that would help you get a better sense of life. If you have tried to be a secular person, you could try being a spiritual one. If you have focused on being a parent, you could focus on being a sibling. If you have focused on making money, you could pay attention to giving away your time. And so on. But in each case, give yourself more opportunities to experience and learn from nature. That is Hesse's real message here.

Ommmm

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