Arnav Surve

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My Most Transformative Text

This semester, I have read several books and poems as part of our SCLA 102 class. Out of these, the text that resonated with me most was *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse. This book follows the life of a Brahmin, Siddhartha, as he leaves his family to pursue his own self-discovery and enlightenment. I found this book compelling because of how the author illustrates Siddhartha as an imperfect protagonist who spends a lot of time dwelling on internal conflict. This is something that I can greatly relate to, and I think a lot of people who read this book would say the same. Personally, I was especially drawn to the book due to its psychedelic ideas such as the concept of oneness with all, love being the most important thing, and how the universe seems to fall into place while on a psychedelic journey or during deep meditation – similar to what Siddhartha experienced as he grew closer to achieving enlightenment. These states allow for intense introspection of the self as well as analysis of society and our relationships with people around us.

After achieving his final enlightenment at the river, Siddhartha explains to Govinda that he cannot love words. I interpreted this as a disdain for the shortcomings of our vocabulary in describing moments of enlightenment. Siddhartha says, “wisdom cannot be imparted. Wisdom that a wise man attempts to impart always sounds like foolishness to someone else … Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom.” He argues that words fall short in conveying the wisdom required for spiritual awakening. An example of this can be found in the river that “speaks” to him. In the book, it is the river which had arguably taught Siddhartha the most, more than any teacher he had or school he joined. I can relate to this as I feel that depth of wisdom and understanding can go far deeper through experience, application, and observation over time.

One of my favorite messages in *Siddhartha* is that love is the most important thing. In the novel, Siddhartha’s intense but unrequited love for his son presents a challenge to his spiritual progression. It is only until he is able to let him go that he is able to continue on his path to enlightenment. Once he achieves enlightenment, he can only describe the experience as a “profound feeling of love for everything around him”. The book teaches that universal love is the end goal while narrow, individualistic love is an obstacle to true enlightenment.

Although I may not be actively seeking enlightenment at the moment, I am inspired to internalize these ideas in order to be more understanding and accepting toward everything and everyone around me. I think *Siddhartha* is a powerful piece of wisdom that every person could stand to learn something from. In the increasingly fragmented world we live in, the lessons of *Siddhartha* are a welcome respite and goal that we can all strive for.

Word Count: 490