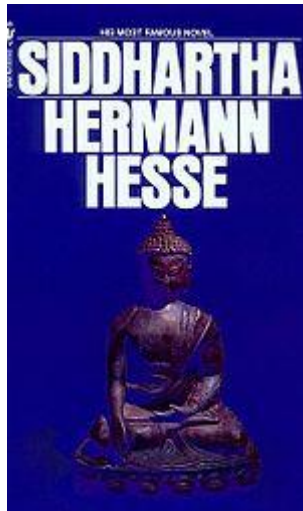


Siddhartha (novel)

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Siddhartha



Author(s)	Hermann Hesse
Translator	Hilda Rosner
Country	Germany
Language	German (Translated into English)
Genre(s)	novel
Publisher	New Directions (US)
Publication date	1922, 1951 (U.S.)
Media type	Print (Paperback)
Pages	152
ISBN	0-553-20884-5
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Siddhartha is a [novel](#) by [Hermann Hesse](#) that deals with the spiritual journey of an [Indian](#) man named Siddhartha during the time of the [Buddha](#).

The book, Hesse's ninth novel (1922), was written in [German](#), in a simple, powerful, and lyrical style. It was published in the U.S. in 1951 and became influential during the 1960s. Hesse dedicated *Siddhartha* to [Romain Rolland](#)^[1] and Wilhelm Gundert.

The word *Siddhartha* derives from two words in the Sanskrit language, *siddha* (achieved) + *artha* (meaning or wealth). The two words together mean "he who has found meaning (of existence)" or "he who has attained his goals".^[2] The Buddha's name, before his renunciation, was Prince Siddhartha Gautama. He was Prince of Kapilvastu, Nepal. In this book, the Buddha is referred to as "Gotama".

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[\[edit\]](#) Plot summary

The story begins by painting a picture of Siddhartha as a perfect son: smart, athletic, obedient, and handsome. However, he eventually sees the limitations of the [Brahmin](#) life, and leaves his home to join the [ascetics](#) with his companion Govinda. The two set out in search of [enlightenment](#). After seeing the limitation of asceticism, the two journey to meet the Buddha. Govinda is immediately impressed and takes refuge in the Buddha. Siddhartha respects the Buddha's enlightenment, but realizes that no teaching, not even the Buddha's, can capture enlightenment.

The second half of the book starts with Siddhartha impressing a beautiful, wealthy courtesan. She sets him up with a job so that he can afford the beautiful things that will impress her. Initially seeing this as a game for children, he eventually finds himself caught up in the trading, drinking, and gambling of a merchant life. He leaves again for the forest. After settling into a nice life sharing ferryman duties with a wise friend, Siddhartha finds out he fathered a son. He attempts to raise the boy in this simple life, but the boy gets frustrated and returns to the city. Siddhartha finally feels the sorrow of love, which leads to a deep compassion for all of his fellow humans.

The story takes place in ancient India around the time of [Gotama Buddha](#) (likely between the fourth and seventh centuries [BCE](#)^[3]).

Experience is the aggregate of conscious events experienced by a human in life – it connotes participation, learning and knowledge. *Understanding* is deep comprehension and internalization. In Hesse's novel Siddhartha, experience is shown as the best way to approach understanding of reality to attain enlightenment. Hesse's crafting of Siddhartha's journey shows that understanding is attained not through scholastic, mind-dependent methods, nor through immersing oneself in asceticism or love and the carnal pleasures of the world. While these individual events only bring about more [samsara](#), they cannot be considered distractions because it is the totality of these experiences that allow Siddhartha to attain understanding.

[\[edit\]](#) Characters

- **Siddhartha**: protagonist
- **Vasudeva**: enlightened ferryman and spiritual guide
- **Govinda**: friend and follower of Siddhartha
- **Kamala**: courtesan and Siddhartha's sensual mentor, mother of his child, **Young Siddhartha**
- **Gotama**: spiritual leader [Buddha](#). Siddhartha rejects his teaching while respecting his enlightenment.
- **Kamaswami**: businessman who instructs Siddhartha on business
- **Siddhartha's Father**: a Brahmin who was unable to satisfy Siddhartha's quest for enlightenment
- **The Samanas**: traveling [ascetics](#) who tell Siddhartha that deprivation leads to enlightenment

[\[edit\]](#) Major themes

A major preoccupation of Hesse in writing *Siddhartha* was to cure his 'sickness with life' (*Lebenskrankheit*) by immersing himself in Indian philosophy such as that expanded in the [Upanishads](#) and the [Bhagavad Gita](#).^[4] The reason the second half of the book took so long to write was that Hesse "had not experienced that transcendental state of unity to which Siddhartha aspires. In an attempt to do so, Hesse lived as a virtual semi-[recluse](#) and became totally immersed in the sacred teachings of both [Hindu](#) and [Buddhist](#) scriptures. His intention was to attain to that 'completeness' which, in the novel, is the [Buddha's](#) badge of distinction."^[5] The novel is structured on three of the traditional [stages of life](#) for Hindu males (student (*brahmacharin*), householder (*grihastha*) and recluse/renunciate (*vanaprastha*)) as well as the Buddha's [four noble truths](#) (Part One) and [eight-fold path](#) (Part Two) which form twelve chapters, the number in the novel.^[6] Ralph Freedman mentions how Hesse commented in a letter "[my] Siddhartha does not, in the end, learn true wisdom from any teacher, but from a river that roars in a funny way and from a kindly old fool who always smiles and is secretly a [saint](#)."^[7] In a lecture about Siddhartha, Hesse claimed "[Buddha's](#) way to [salvation](#) has often been criticized and doubted, because it is thought to be wholly grounded in [cognition](#). True, but it's not just intellectual cognition, not just learning and knowing, but [spiritual](#) experience that can be earned only through strict discipline in a selfless life."^[7] Freedman also points out how *Siddhartha* described Hesse's interior [dialectic](#): "All of the contrasting poles of his life were sharply etched: the restless departures and the search for stillness at home; the diversity of experience and the harmony of a unifying spirit; the security of [religious dogma](#) and the [anxiety](#) of [freedom](#)."^[8]

[\[edit\]](#) Film versions

A film version entitled [Siddhartha](#) was released in 1972. It starred [Shashi Kapoor](#) and was directed by Conrad Rooks.

In 1971, a surrealistic adaptation as a musical Western was released as [Zachariah](#). [John Rubinstein](#) starred in the title role and George Englund was the director. [Don Johnson](#) played Matthew, the equivalent of Govinda.

[\[edit\]](#) English translations

In recent years several American publishers have commissioned new translations of the novel, which had previously been impossible because of copyright restrictions. In addition to these newer translations, Hilda Rosner's original 1951 translation is still being sold in a number of reprint editions put out by various publishers. The newest translations include:

- [Modern Library](#), a translation by Susan Bernofsky, foreword by [Tom Robbins](#), translator's preface (2006).
- Penguin, a translation by [Joachim Neugroschel](#), introduction by Ralph Freedman, translator's note (2002).
- Barnes & Noble, a translation by Rika Lesser, introduction by Robert A. Thurman (2007).
- Shambhala Classics, a translation by Sherab Chödzin Kohn, introduction by Paul W. Morris, translator's preface (1998).

[[edit](#)] Musical references

- The 1972 [Yes](#) song [Close to The Edge](#) from the *Close to the Edge* album was inspired by the book.
- [Nick Drake](#) wrote the song "River Man" ([sample](#)) and is the second listed song from Nick Drake's 1969 album *Five Leaves Left*, remastered and released as a single in 2004. According to Drake's manager, Joe Boyd, Drake thought of the song as the centre piece of the album.
- [Jerry Cantrell](#) has a song called "Siddhartha" on his [Degradation Trip](#) double album.
- [Andrew McMahon](#) of the bands [Something Corporate](#) and [Jack's Mannequin](#) has the quote "the river is everywhere" tattooed on his wrist and is currently working on a clothing line called River Apparel.
- The [Hot Water Music](#) song *Sunday Suit* contains the line "Siddhartha style, I'll choose a path of open minds".
- [Pete Townshend](#)'s song *The Ferryman* was written for a modern production of Siddhartha in June 1976.
- The Slovenian rock band [Siddharta](#) was named after the novel.
- [Ten Mile Tide](#) wrote a song entitled *Siddhartha* which provides a musical version of the novel.
- [Ralph McTell](#) wrote the song *The Ferryman* also based on the novel for his 1971 album [You Well-Meaning Brought Me Here](#).
- [Atmosphere \(music group\)](#)'s [Sad Clown Bad Dub II](#) album contains a song entitled "The River", believed by some to inspired by the novel.
- [Peter Maybarduk](#) created the song and music video *Siddhartha on His Raft* in 2009.^[1]
- [Cise Star](#) from the hip hop group [Cyne](#) wrote a song called "Adrift" in which he quotes, "Sitting by Siddhartha by the edge of the river, Listening eagerly to the voices the tide will deliver"
- The Canadian composer [Claude Vivier](#) wrote a piece in 1976 for large orchestra called *Siddhartha* which was inspired by the book.
- [Radiohead](#) wrote a song entitled "Pyramid Song" which talks about when Siddhartha was dreaming about jumping in the river.

[[edit](#)] Other References

[Fred Mayer](#) published a photographic essay named *Homage to Hermann Hesse and his Siddhartha*, which is based on Hesse's novel^[9].

[[edit](#)] References

1. [^] <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2499>
2. [^] ["The Life of Siddhartha Gautama"](#). Retrieved 2008-03-27.
3. [^] Cousins, L.S. (1996). ["The Dating of the Historical Buddha: A Review Article"](#). *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Series 3 (Cambridge, England: [Cambridge University Press](#)) **6** (1): 57–63. [ISSN 1356-1863](#). Retrieved 2009-02-27.
4. [^] Donald McClory introduction to Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Picador. London 1998 pp 24-25.
5. [^] Donald McClory introduction to Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Picador. London 1998 p26.
6. [^] Donald McClory introduction to Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Picador. London 1998 pp41-42.
7. [^] ^{[a](#)} ^{[b](#)} Ralph Freedman. Hermann Hesse. *Pilgrim of Crisis*. Jonathan Cape. London. 1979 p 233.
8. [^] Ralph Freedman. Hermann Hesse. *Pilgrim of Crisis*. Jonathan Cape. London. 1979 p 235.
9. [^] http://www.fred-mayer.com/blurp_EN.html

[[edit](#)] External links

- Full texts of *Siddhartha* in [original German](#) and [English translation](#) from [Project Gutenberg](#)
- Audio recording in English of [Siddhartha](#) from Librivox.org

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