

Study/Discussion Questions

Siddhartha

1. Do a little research on the basic tenets of Buddhism so we can discuss them as they pertain to the book:

- four noble truths
- eight fold path
- karma
- samsara
- dukkha/dukkha
- tanha/craving

2. What is “evil” according to Buddhism?

3. The river is a huge symbol in “Siddhartha,” and in Buddhism. Explore the symbolism of the river and write down all the meanings/insights you gain from this exploration. Here are some sample issues/thoughts/questions (please don’t limit your exploration to just these):

- how many times is a river mentioned in the book?**
- what does a river symbolize? (more than one thing)
- where does a river come from?
- where is a river going?
- what can a river show us about identity...unity....diversity?
- what can a river show us about time/temporality/eternity?
- what can a river show us about change?
- what can a river teach us about listening?
- “The river knows everything; one can learn everything from it.”
(Siddhartha)...what might this mean?
- how can a river “have voice”?

4. Consider the following quatrain from the Dhammapada (The *Dhammapada* is a collection of words/verses/speeches/etc. attributed to the Buddha):

*There is no fire like lust.
There is no grip like hate.
There is no net like delusion.
There is no river like craving.*

- what meanings can you glean from these lines?
- how are inner and outer forces represented?
- how is a river both like and unlike a fire/net/grip?

5. What lines/scenes/descriptions stand out for you from the book? Think about them and be prepared to discuss several that hold meaning for you.

6. What do the following words mean?

- atman
- kama
- artha
- dharma
- moksa (moksha)
- karma
- maya
- samsara
- swami

7. Why do you think there is so much emphasis on (re-use of the word) “thirst”? What is Siddhartha thirsty for? Why can’t he find it?

8. Why would Siddhartha (or anyone, for that matter) choose to become a Samana (an ascetic)? What might someone gain from this?

9. What is/are the significance(s) of Siddhartha meeting Gautama? How does this meeting involve a temporal “distortion”? What teaching (if any) did Siddhartha gain from this meeting? Who is Gautama?

10. What is the “gap” identified by Siddhartha in Gautama’s teaching to him? What is the significance of this?

11. What is Siddhartha’s “awakening”? What is an awakening? Have you had one...if so, what was it like? How did it affect your understanding of reality/meaning/life/death/self/identity/knowledge?

12. Siddhartha states, “Truly, nothing in the world has occupied my thoughts as much as this ego of mine, this enigmatic fact that I live, that I am one and separated and isolated from all others, that I am Siddhartha! And there is nothing in the world I know less about than myself, than Siddhartha!” (36). Pick this claim apart and make sense of it. What does it mean to you? Can you relate to Siddhartha’s claim?

13. How valuable are Siddhartha’s talents...the ability to think, to wait, to fast?

14. When he’s among the “child people,” Siddhartha sees life as a game. Do you think/feel that our lives are games? Do you also have a sense (as Siddhartha did on p. 63) that, “real life was flowing past him and not touching him”?

15. Why do both Siddhartha and Kamala not feel love? Why does Siddhartha say that one can only practice love as an art if one does not love?

16. Do you feel “captured” by the world as Siddhartha does on p. 70?

17. What is the significance of Kamala’s bird on p. 73...and again on p. 76?

18. Why did Siddhartha spit at his reflection in the river (p. 78)? What does this mean in terms of identity...of one's understanding of reality?
19. Why would Siddhartha see his desire to commit suicide (p. 78-79) as a "childish wish"?
20. How is rebirth represented in the story? Is rebirth the same as/different from reincarnation?
21. What happens to Siddhartha when he meditates (at any instance in the story)? What does he experience while he meditates? Does this reinforce or challenge your previous notions about meditation?
22. Can too much knowledge be a bad thing? How does Siddhartha see it as an hindrance?
23. What does Siddhartha ultimately learn from the river? p.117-119
24. What lessons do we (and Siddhartha) learn from the relationship between Siddhartha and his son?
25. What do we learn from the final meeting between Siddhartha and Govinda?
26. What do you make of the following lines:
 - "Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom" (124)
 - "The opposite of every truth is just as true!" (124)
 - "The world, my friend, Govinda, is not imperfect or developing slowly toward perfection. Now, the world is perfect at every moment, all sin contains grace, all youngsters already contain oldsters, all babies contain death, all the dying contain eternal life" (125)
 - "Words are not good for the secret meaning, everything instantly becomes a bit different when we utter it, a bit adulterated, a bit foolish..." (126)
27. What does Govinda "see" in Siddhartha on p. 130-132?