

SIDDHARTHA: OVERVIEW OF CHPS. 1-2

1. Hello Everyone. The intention of today's presentation is to provide an overview of main ideas for the first two chapters of *Siddhartha*.
2. As you learned through the introductory information for the novel, *Siddhartha* is a fiction story about a man's journey to self-fulfillment. The concept of a journey story is not new.
3. Hundreds of books and movies—both true and created—feature individuals and characters taking trips. Sometimes the trips are physical adventures and sometimes they're personal explorations.
4. Siddhartha's search for enlightenment is individual and internal.

Before we specially look at some lines in Chps. 1 and 2, here are a few definitions you may find helpful.

5. Om: a mantra—or something repeated over and over—which is often used in meditation to help someone be aware of the presence of the spirit world. Its intent is to focus the mind on the word or the sound, rather than all of the other distracting going on in the brain.
6. Atman: a Sanskrit word that refers to the spiritual being or soul within everyone
7. Brahmin: a member of the priestly and highest Hindu caste (also spelled Brahman)
8. Brahma: another Sanskrit word that refers to the supreme spirit of the universe

Now back to the story...

9. The first chapter of *Siddhartha* is titled "The Brahmin's Son." "The Brahmin's son" refers Siddhartha himself.

I'm sure you remember the line in Chapter 1 that says: "...everybody loved Siddhartha. He delighted and made everybody happy." (5) That's pretty nice!

10. Unfortunately, the chapter also reveals that Siddhartha, himself, was not happy. He was dissatisfied with the Brahmin way of life and following the traditional practices of Hinduism as demonstrated by his father and other Brahmins. The book says that Siddhartha's "intellect was not satisfied, his soul was not at peace, his heart was not still." (5) He realizes that the Hindu way of life was not bringing him closer to nirvana—or personal fulfillment.

According to the story, he was "thirsty" and "sorrowful" (8) for more – for a sense of inner-peace – for becoming closer to Brahma, the supreme spirit of the universe.

11. So, he decided to try a new way of living – the Samana way – including living as an ascetic and practicing self-denial and minimalism. An ascetic is a person who leads a simple life, generally abstaining from the normal pleasures of life and also denying himself or herself material satisfaction and possessions. In Chapter 2, Siddhartha participates in and clearly demonstrates this lifestyle.

12. But first, he wants his father's permission—his blessing—to leave home and follow the Samanas. Siddhartha doesn't need this permission or blessing, but he respects his father and wants to part on loving terms. I'm sure you remember the scene near the end of Chapter 1 where Siddhartha stages a "silent protest" to show his father how much the move means to him.

13. Eventually, Siddhartha's father lets his son go, emotionally, and says: "If you find bliss in the forest, come back and teach it to me." (12) This is a great demonstration of love between father and son.

And that's the end of Chapter 1. If you followed all of that, then you understand the gist of the story so far.

14. Chapter 2 is titled "With the Samanas." This title refers to Siddhartha and his friend Govinda. This also marks the beginning of Siddhartha's personal journey to fulfillment.

15. Chapter 2 describes Siddhartha and Govinda living the minimalist, ascetic, Samana lifestyle. They practice self-denial, such as giving away their clothes (except for essential coverings); eating only once a day rather than fully filling themselves with food not needed to stay alive; growing their nails and beards to demonstrate unnecessary attention to appearance; feeling contempt for those with wealth; and meditating, which requires regulating their thoughts as well as their breaths. This is a drastic lifestyle, the goal of which is to empty the self of "stuff" and desire for non-essentials. The philosophy here, which Siddhartha explains, is that voluntary suffering will bring someone closer to nirvana or ultimate bliss. The problem, which Siddhartha also explains, is that even though he may have achieved this peacefulness and moved away from himself for a while, his "self" always came back. The practices he was following only provided a temporary escape from real, conscious life.

16. Hence, later in Chapter 2, Siddhartha performs a kind of "check" with Govinda. He asks Govinda: Have we reached our goal? Are we closer to enlightenment? (16)

17. The answer is no. This practice of asceticism only brings them temporary "salvation" while meditating. Two important quotes from the story include:

* Siddhartha has "not grown wiser, not gained knowledge not climbed any higher" (17)

AND

* Siddhartha is as "remote from wisdom, from salvation, as a child in the womb" (17)

Siddhartha also says that even their Samana leader has not reached the goal of enlightenment.

18. So...it's no surprise that he decides he needs to try a new way to self-fulfillment, and this new way is to follow Gotama, the Illustrious, the Buddha, in this case, the real founder of Buddhism. (20)

19. The title of Chapter 3, which is "Gotama" is no surprise then, and this encounter is what you'll be reading about next on Siddhartha's journey.

And that's the end of Chapter 2. If you followed all of that, then you understand the gist of the story so far.

20. Quickly, before I close this presentation, I wonder if you're noticing Hermann Hesse's writing style in the book. Some of my favorite examples of his writing style include:

* The very first sentence of the story which reads: "In the shade of the house, in the sunshine on the river bank by the boats, in the shade of the willow wood and the fig tree, Siddhartha, the handsome Brahmin's son, grew up with his friend Govinda." (3)

This example of language demonstrates imagery, of course, in addition to alliteration, with all of the words that start with the letter S.

21. An example of a simile in Chp. 2 includes the line:

* "Siddhartha was going his own way; his destiny was beginning to unfold itself, and with his destiny, his own. And he became as pale as a dried banana skin." (9)

I'll try to remember to point out more example of Hesse's style as we work through the book. Try to recognize it yourself as you continue reading.

22. Now it's time for you to keep on reading. Your next set of chapters to cover includes 3, 4, 5, 6, on pgs. 25-73. Happy reading!