

# **Siddhartha LAP**

*Topic #8*

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Everything we do in the world is absolutely pointless. We as humans are irrelevant specks in the vast universe that go about our repetitive lives for no apparent reason. At the end of the day, it makes no difference how much good or bad we do in the world. This is the ignorant view of the world that fails to see the perfect harmony in which we all live our lives. The redundant cycles that we try so hard to get away from are part of our overarching connectedness as humans. As parts of a whole, all of us have a role to play in making our lives better for ourselves and others. Our role is the very meaning of life, and we should embrace it wholeheartedly. The novel *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse stresses this cyclical unification through various circular constructions throughout Siddhartha's life. Siddhartha had to deal with many individual stages of his life that seemed pointless. These cycles almost drove him to the point of suicide, but he was saved by the river which acted as a symbol for his entire life, as a united whole. This was the gateway to his attainment of enlightenment, allowing him to feel closer to everyone around him.

Siddhartha began as an affluent Brahmin's son, coveted by all close to him. His family and friends greatly admired the level of intuition and intellect that Siddhartha had possessed. Govinda, his best friend, constantly adored him and followed in his footsteps. In this life, Siddhartha began the struggle with his ego. Hesse explicates the paradox of knowledge held by the Brahmins. "They knew everything...they had concerned themselves with everything and with more than everything: the creation of the world, the genesis of speech, of food, of inhaling. But was it worthwhile knowing all this if you did not know the One and Only, the most important, the only important thing"(Hesse 6). Here it is very apparent that through the teachings of the

Brahmin, Siddhartha would learn everything, but still nothing. Such is the first element of circular construction through the book. Siddhartha feels trapped in a cycle of constantly fighting with his own ego, and no matter how much he meditates, no matter how much of the Vedas Siddhartha recites, it feels impossible for him to reach his end goal. He still falls back to his old ways and can never truly immerse himself in Atman. He is essentially trapped by the customs and traditions of the Brahmin, unable to prosper in knowledge through himself. This is precisely why Siddhartha had left the Brahmin's for his next cycle, the samanas. Siddhartha was able to use his iron will to make his father relent in letting him move on in his journey of life.

The samanas, in a spiritual sense were the exact opposite to the Brahmins. Rather than immersing one's body in Brahma and Atman, Siddhartha avidly starved himself and lost contact with the physical world in order to gain a deeper understanding of himself. "When the entire self was transcended and extinct, when every drive and every mania in the heart had fallen silent, then the ultimate was bound to awaken, the innermost essence, which is no longer ego, the great secret"(Hesse 14). Hesse shows the paradox of how losing the connection to your body can actually help you gather a deeper understanding of your personhood. However, this attempt at perfection was also inherently flawed. Siddhartha likened the starvation and constant meditation to a simple alcoholic or a gambler. "What is meditation? It is flight from the ego, it is a brief numbing pain and of the senselessness of life. The same flight is found by the oxdriver at the inn when he drinks a cup of rice wine"(Hesse 16). The irony of how even though the two groups have wildly different goals, but ultimately accomplish the same task is ever-present during this chapter and gives birth to the next cycle that Siddhartha endures. The cycle of the samanas is the unfortunate reality that regardless of how much you disconnect yourself from your own body,

you still are trapped within it. Regardless of how much you starve yourself, you still have to eat. Unending amounts of restricting your breathing will only lead to the inevitable next breath. Even though Siddhartha had learned much from the samanas, but his razor focused goal in removing all desire and all ego led him to leave these imperfect practices.

Afterwards, Siddhartha had met the Sublime Gotama. He was completely mesmerized by the enlightenment that Gotama had achieved, and this catalyzed Siddhartha's decision to learn through his experiences in life instead of teachings. He had officially set in motion the most formidable cycle in his life, *samsara*. Siddhartha had resolved to learn the ways of everyday life through both Kamala and Kamaswami. "I have come to tell you this, O Kamala! You are the first woman to whom Siddhartha has spoken to without lowered eyes"(Hesse 30). This is the first time Siddhartha attempts to be cognizant of the everyday world. Kamala's role of teaching Siddhartha about love proves to be essential as it is the first time Siddhartha pays attention to the common world. It also is the spark that leads Siddhartha into merchant life, as Kamala tells him to do work as a merchant under Kamaswami. This name allegorically refers to one who is a master of desire or distraction, and it foreshadows Siddhartha's incipient loss of focus. Initially, Siddhartha had treated this merchant life as a game, even though he was especially exceptional at it. However, Siddhartha had eventually become addicted to this drug and was trapped in the redundancy of losing and gaining in life for no substantive purpose. The danger of *samsara* is one of which that people simply go through the motions of their life without reflecting on why they are making these decisions. "He kept fleeing-fleeing into a new game of chance, fleeing into a daze of lust, of wine, and from there back to the drive to acquire and accumulate more. In this senseless cycle, he ran himself weary, ran himself old, ran himself ill"(Hesse 71). Siddhartha had

ironically halted his wheel of knowledge even though he was trapped in the continuous loop of life. Trapped in the eternal hell of pointlessness, Siddhartha was driven to the point of suicide.

As he began reconciling his death Siddhartha's cycle of life had just reset. Looking at himself with complete disdain, he was only saved by the very first thing he learned as a Brahmin. "But now, from the remote regions of his soul, from past times of his worn-out life, a sound came flashing. It was the sacred "om", which virtually means "the perfect"(Hesse 78). This word had brought Siddhartha back to his roots. It was the first step in gaining back the essential goal he had always chased with ferocity. In the most important paradox of the whole book, losing absolutely everything he learned as a samana and brahmin had renewed his youthful self once again. "Now that I am no longer young, now that my hair is already half gray-I am starting all over again, like a child!"(Hesse 84). The lessons of the samanas in regards to losing everything had never rang more prevalent in Siddhartha's mind. Losing the massive ego that was his knowledge allowed him to truly connect to the lessons he had learned in his past life.

With renewed vigor, Siddhartha's connection with the harmony of the world was reinforced by reuniting with the people held most dear to him in his life before. The return of Kamala and his Siddhartha's son is the last step in fully revolving through the circuitous nature of life. Reconnecting with the people he loved most was imperative, because ironically he needed to learn how to let them go. Siddhartha's son's polar views from himself made it impossible for the two of them to foster any sort of relationship. Because of this, Siddhartha had to eventually let him go. Just as Siddhartha's father had dealt with letting go of Siddhartha, he himself must let go of his own son. All of this, from remembering the sacred "om" as a brahmin, to being able to let go of the ones he loved most in samsara, had led up to Siddhartha feeling

perfect unity within the world. “They all merged into the flow, they all flowed as a river toward the goal, ardent, desiring, suffering...He could no longer distinguish between the many voices:they all belonged together”(Hesse 118). Becoming cognizant of the interwoven fates of everyone in this world had given Siddhartha the gateway to enlightenment. Only now was Siddhartha truly able to understand the perfection of this world; that everything in this world has its place, not as an individual but as a unique part of the whole.

It was no longer the burning passion and ambition that drove Siddhartha, but the content and satisfaction that led Siddhartha to losing ego. No matter how pointless life seems, every single person has etched themselves in this world for better or for worse. While we may not be the same, we all coincide together and function interdependently in order to thrive as a society. In this manner, it is incumbent upon us to find this role so that we may fully understand our individual personhood. Hesse explicates this idea best through the iron-willed Siddhartha. Siddhartha’s numerous and coinciding cycles truly show how absolutely every stage of his life was relevant. He faced many individual stages of his life that at first glance seemed pointless and horrid, but these cycles ultimately converged at the river where it flowed with the harmony of the world. The end result is feeling whole, as one can live within the perfection of creation.