

# Hermann Hesse



## SIDDHARTHA An Indian Tale

1922

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# First Part

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# The Brahmin's Son

In the shade of the house, in the sunshine of the riverbank near the boats, in the shade of the sal-tree forest and the fig tree, Siddhartha, the handsome Brahmin's son, the young falcon, grew up together with his friend Govinda. The sun tanned his lean shoulders as he bathed in the river and while performing the sacred ablutions along the river bank. As he played in the mango grove, shadows darkened his eyes. His mother would sing, as his father, a scholar, would talk with the gathered wise men. Siddhartha had long engaged in conversations with the wise men, as well as practiced debate, the art of reflection and the service of meditation with his friend Govinda. Already he knew how to pronounce the Om silently—the word of words. To speak it silently into himself while inhaling, to say it silently with all his soul when exhaling. The aura of pure spirit shined upon him. Already he knew how to feel Atman within the depths of his being, indestructible, at one with the universe.

His father's heart was filled with delight for his son was intelligent and thirsty for knowledge; he saw him growing up to be a great man of wisdom, a priest, a prince among the Brahmins.

Immense pride filled his mother's breast when she saw him, when she saw him walk, when she saw him sit down and rise, Siddhartha—strong, handsome, slender-limbed, always greeting her with perfect grace.

Love stirred the hearts of the Brahmins' young daughters when Siddhartha walked through the lanes of the town, with his luminous forehead, eyes of a king, and slim figure.

But it was his friend Govinda, a Brahmin's son, that loved him more than all others. Govinda loved Siddhartha's bright eyes and voice of clarity. He loved the way he walked, the complete grace of his movements; he loved everything Siddhartha did and said, and what he loved most was his pure spirit: his intellect, his fine ardent thoughts, his strong will, his higher calling. Govinda knew he would not become an ordinary Brahmin, not a lazy sacrificial official in charge of offerings; not a greedy merchant of magic spells; not a worthless orator, not a sly wicked priest, nor a decent stupid sheep amongst a large herd. No, and he, Govinda, did not want to become one of those as well, not a Brahmin like the tens of thousands of their kind. He wanted to follow Siddhartha, the beloved, the magnificent. And if in the days to come, Siddhartha become a god, if he became one of the glorious All-Radiant, then Govinda wanted to follow him as his friend, his companion, his servant, his lance bearer, his shadow.

Thus Siddhartha was loved by everyone. He brought delight and joy to all.

But he, Siddhartha, was not happy. Wandering the rosy paths of the fig tree garden, sitting in contemplation in the bluish shade of the grove, washing his limbs daily in the bath of atonement, offering sacrifices in the shady depths of the mango forest with divine manner, beloved by all, a joy to all, yet there was no joy within his own heart. Dreams and restless thoughts came into his mind, flowing from the water of the river, from the sparkling stars of the night, from the sun's melting rays of light. Dreams and a restlessness of the soul came to him, arising from the smoke of the sacrifices, emanating forth from the verses of the Rig-Veda, being infused into him, drop by drop, from the teachings of the old Brahmins.

Siddhartha began to sense the growth of discontentment within him. He felt an unease that the love of his father and mother, and also the love of his friend, Govinda, would not always bring him happiness, would not for ever give him peace, would not nurture and satisfy him. He had started to suspect that his honourable father and his other teachers, the wise Brahmins, had already passed on to him the most and best of their wisdom, that they had already poured the sum total of their knowledge into his expecting vessel; and the vessel was not yet full, his intellect was not satisfied, his spirit was not content, his soul was not at peace, his heart was not calm. The ablutions were good, but they were water; they did not wash sins away, they did not relieve the distressed heart. The sacrifices and the supplication of the gods were marvellous—but was this everything? Did the sacrifices bring happiness? And what about the gods? Was it really Prajapati who had created the world? Was it not the Atman, He alone, who had created it? Were the gods not created like me and you, mortal, subjected to the passage of time? Was it therefore good, was it right, was it meaningful, sensible and worthy to make offerings to the gods? To whom else should offerings be made, to whom else should one worship but Him, Atman, the Only One? And where was Atman to be found, where did He dwell, where did His eternal heart beat, where else if not within one's own Self, in the innermost eternal part in which everyone had within themselves? But where was this Self, this innermost sacred part? It was not flesh and bone, it was not thought nor consciousness. That of which the wise men taught. So where, then, was it? To reach the Self, towards Atman—was there another way worth looking for? Nobody showed the way, nobody knew it—not his father, and not the teachers or wise men, nor the holy songs! The Brahmins and their holy books knew everything, everything; they had explored

and explained everything—the creation of the world, the origin of speech, of food, of inhaling, of exhaling, the arrangement of the senses, the acts of the gods. They knew a tremendous amount of things—but what was its value to know all these things if they did not know the one most important thing, the only important thing?

The glorious verses of the holy books, especially the Upanishades of Sama-Veda, spoke of this innermost blessed thing. It is written: “Your soul is the whole world.” It says that when one is deep asleep, they reach their innermost part where Atman dwells. The wonderful wisdom of these verses; all the knowledge of the wisest ones has been collected here in enchanting words, pure as honey collected by bees. No, this tremendous amount of understanding and insight, collected and preserved by successive generations of wise Brahmins should not be disregarded. But where were the Brahmins, the priests, the wise men, who were successful in not only attaining this profound knowledge, but also experiencing it? Where were the insightful ones who, after residing in Atman in sleep, could bring forth this holy experience into consciousness, into life, into our every word and liveliness? Siddhartha knew many worthy Brahmins, above all his father—pure, wise, holy. His father was worthy of admiration; quiet and noble were his manners, he who lived a pure life, his words were wise; fine and noble thoughts prevalent in his mind—but even he, who knew so much, did he live in bliss, was he at peace within, was he not still searching for more? Did he not go continually to the holy springs with an insatiable thirst, again and again, making sacrificial offerings to the books, to the discourses of the Brahmins? Why did he, the faultless one, need to wash away sins, to cleanse himself every day? Was Atman not within him? Was this immaculate source not within his heart? One must find the

source within one's own Self, it must be possessed! Everything else was just searching—a detour, a fallacy.

These were Siddhartha's thoughts; this was his thirst, this was his sorrow.

Often he repeated to himself passages from one of the Chandogya-Upanishad texts: "In truth, the name Brahman is Shakha. Indeed, he who knows this will enter the heavenly world every day." It often seemed near—the heavenly world—but never had he reached it completely, never had he quenched the ultimate thirst. And among all the wise men he knew and whose teachings he enjoyed, there was not one who had completely reached it—the heavenly world—not one who had completely quenched the eternal thirst.

"Govinda," said Siddhartha to his friend, "Govinda, come with me to the banyan tree. We will practice meditation."

They went to the banyan tree and sat down, twenty paces apart. After sitting himself down, ready to pronounce the Om, Siddhartha softly recited the verse:

"Om is the bow, the arrow is the soul,  
Brahman is the arrow's target,  
At which one aims unflinchingly."

After the customary time of practicing meditation had passed, Govinda rose. Evening had come and it was time to perform the evening's ablutions. He called Siddhartha's name, though he did not answer. Siddhartha sat absorbed in thought, his eyes focused towards a distant goal, the tip of his tongue showed slightly between his teeth. He seemed to not be breathing. Thus he sat, absorbed in meditation, thinking Om, his soul the arrow sent for Brahman.

Once, Samanas travelled through Siddhartha's town, ascetics on a pilgrimage, they were three thin weary men, neither old nor young, with dusty and bloody shoulders, near naked, scorched by the sun, solitary, strange and hostile—enemies to the world—hungry jackals in the human realm. Around them hovered an atmosphere of quiet passion, of destructive service, of merciless self-denial.

That evening, after an hour of contemplation, Siddhartha spoke to Govinda: "Tomorrow morning, my friend, Siddhartha is going to join the Samanas. He is going to become a Samana."

Govinda turned pale, when he heard these words and read the decision in his friend's determined face, undeviating as the arrow shot from the bow. From this first glance, Govinda realized that it is *now* beginning. Now Siddhartha will go his own way. Now his destiny is his own. Govinda had turned pale as a dry banana-skin.

"Oh, Siddhartha," he exclaimed, "will your father permit it?"

Siddhartha looked over at him as if he had just awoken. As quick as lightning he read in Govinda's soul, the fear, the submission.

"Govinda, we will not waste words" he spoke softly. "Tomorrow at daybreak I will begin to live with the Samanas. Speak no more of it."

Siddhartha entered the room where his father was sitting on a mat made of bast. He quietly moved behind his father and remained standing there until his father felt his presence.



“Is it you, Siddhartha?” the Brahmin asked. “Then speak your mind.”

Siddhartha said: “With your permission, Father, I came to tell you that I wish to leave your house tomorrow and join the ascetics. My desire is to become a Samana. I trust that my father will not oppose this.”

The Brahmin remained silent for so long that the stars passed across the small window and changed their design before the silence in the room was finally broken. The son stood silent and motionless with his arms folded. The father, silent and motionless, sitting on the mat, and the stars moved in their paths across in the sky. Then his father spoke: “It is not proper for a Brahmin to speak harsh and angry words, but there is displeasure in my heart. I wish not to hear this request a second time.”

Slowly, the Brahmin rose. Siddhartha remained silently standing with his arms folded.

“What are you waiting for?” asked his father.

“You know why,” Siddhartha answered.

His father left the room displeased and went to lay down on his bed.

An hour passed without sleep, the Brahmin arose, and after pacing to and fro he left the house. He went to the small window of the room where he had left his son. When he looked inside he saw that Siddhartha was still standing, unmoved, with his arms still folded. He could see his pale robe shimmering. With a heavy heart, the father returned to his bed.

After another hour without sleep, the Brahmin stood up again, paced to and fro, then walked out of the house and saw that the moon had risen. He returned to the window and

looked inside; there Siddhartha stood, unmoving, his arms folded; moonlight reflecting from his bare shins. With his heart troubled, the father went back to bed.

He returned again after another hour had passed and then again after two hours, looked through the small window and saw Siddhartha standing there in the moonlight, in the starlight, in the darkness. Silently, hour after hour, throughout the night he returned to look through the window and saw him standing unmoving. His heart filled with anger, with anxiety, with fear, with sorrow.

And in the night's last hour, before the break of dawn, he returned again, entered the room and looked upon the young man standing there. He now seemed taller and a stranger to him.

"Siddhartha," he said, "why are you waiting?"

"You know why."

"Will you continue to stand that way, waiting, until it is day, noon, evening?"

"I will stand and wait.

"You will become tired, Siddhartha."

"I will become tired."

"You will fall asleep, Siddhartha."

"I will not fall asleep."

"You will die, Siddhartha."

"I will die."

"And would you rather die than obey your father?"

"Siddhartha has always obeyed his father."

"So will you abandon your plan?"

“Siddhartha will do what his father will tell him to do.”

The first light of day entered the room. The Brahmin saw that Siddhartha's knees trembled slightly, but there was no trembling in Siddhartha's face; his eyes were focused upon an inner distance. It was then the father realized that Siddhartha could no longer reside with him at home, that he had already left him.

The father touched Siddhartha's shoulder.

He said: “You will go into the forest and be a Samana. If you find bliss in the forest, then come back and teach me to be blissful. If you find disillusionment, then come back and once again we will make offerings to the gods together. Go now and kiss your mother, tell her where you are going. For me, however, it is time to go to the river and perform the first ablution.”

He took his hand from his son's shoulder and went outside. Siddhartha swayed as he tried to walk. He gained control of himself, bowed to his father and went to his mother to do as his father had told him to.

As, with benumbed legs, he slowly left the still sleeping town at the first light of day, a crouching shadow emerged from the last hut and joined the pilgrim. It was Govinda.

“You have come,” said Siddhartha and smiled.

“I have come,” said Govinda.

The End  
of the  
*Free Preview*  
for

# Siddhartha



## HERMANN HESSE

(July 2, 1877 – August 9, 1962)

Brahmín

Upanishads

Om