Herman Hesse?S Siddhartha Essay, Research Paper

Siddhartha

In Herman Hesse’s Siddhartha, Unity is a reflecting theme of this novel and in life. Unity is first introduced by means of the river and by the mystical word “Om.” Siddhartha’s quest for knowledge began when he left his father and sought the teachings of the Samanas. By becoming a Samana Siddhartha had to give up all of his possessions and learn to survive with practically nothing. He quickly picked up all of the Samanas’ tricks like meditating, abandonment of the Self, fasting, and holding of the breath. By abandoning the Self, Siddhartha left himself and took on many other forms and became many other things. At first, this excited Siddhartha and he craved more. He took on the shape and life of everything, but he would always return to himself. After he began to notice this endless cycle he realized how dissatisfied it really made him. He had learned all the noble tools the samanas had taught for attaining the innermost Being that is no longer Self, yet even after mastering all of the arts he never progressed further than his cycle of abandoning his Self and returning to it.

Although Siddhartha felt dissatisfied with his stay with the Samanas, in reflection there were a lot of things that he took from his experience with them. He mastered the art of self-denial and many ways of losing the Self, which was very important. He became patient enough to wait for anything and learned to live without food or any other necessities. Siddhartha makes his first significant step towards attaining Nirvana when he leaves the Brahmins to live with the Samanas. Although he could never truly attain Nirvana with the Samanas, the major step is that he began to question his method to attain enlightenment.

Govinda is Siddhartha’s childhood friend. He is a foil to Siddhartha, serving as a benchmark for the latter’s progress toward enlightenment. Govinda spends part I of the novel with Siddhartha and then leaves to follow the Buddha. He reappears at points of transition in Siddhartha’s life, and is with Siddhartha at the novel’s end to learn his wisdom. Kamaswami is the merchant for whom Siddhartha works while living in town. It is from the clever though impatient Kamaswami that Siddhartha learns how to conduct business and concern himself with money and material goods. Vasuveda is the ferryman with whom Siddhartha lives for the last third of the novel. He is an uneducated man, but he is an excellent listener and teaches Siddhartha through example. Most notably, Vasuveda teaches Siddhartha to listen to the wisdom of the river, a wisdom that leads both Vasuveda and Siddhartha to enlightenment.

Another common theme is where the main character questions his society, or religion. In Siddhartha, he is questioning both his religion and his society, because they are one and the same. In my own experience, I haven’t ever been pressured to be part of one particular belief system, so I have been free to experience many different religions. Siddhartha also was allowed to change his beliefs, but he had a base religion to start with. Siddhartha is clearly the perfect and glorious character in this book. He, an individual, has found his own way to the desired goal of peace, harmony, and Unity.

Quotes

“Siddhartha had one single goal- to become empty, to become empty of thirst, desire, dreams, pleasure and sorrow- to let the Self die. No longer to be Self, to experience the peace of an emptied heart, to experience pure thought- that was his goal.”

(p. 14)

“Slowly, like moisture entering the dying tree trunk, slowly filling and rotting it, so did the world and inertia creep into Siddhartha’s soul; it slowly filled his soul, made it heavy, made it tired, sent it to sleep.” (p. 76)

“Nothing is mine, I know nothing, I possess nothing, I have learned nothing. How strange it is! Now, when I am no longer young, when my hair is fast growing gray, when strength begins to diminish, now I am beginning again like a child.” (p. 95)

“He is doing what you yourself have neglected to do. He is looking after himself; he is going his own way.” (p. 124)

“I learned through my body and soul that it was necessary for me to sin, that I needed lust, that I had to strive for property and experience nausea and the depths of despair in order to learn not to resist them, in order to learn to love the world, and no longer compare it with some kind of desired imaginary world…” (p. 144)

“How, indeed, could he not know love, he who has recognized all humanity’s vanity and transitoriness, yet loves humanity so much that he has devoted a long life solely to help and teach people? Also with this great teacher, the thing to me is of greater importance than the words; his deeds and life are more important to me than his talk, the gesture of his hand is more important to me than his opinions.” (p. 148)