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## Existence: The Phases of Evolution Towards the Meaning of Life Through *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse

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**Abstract:** To exist is to be in reality. The nature of reality is to omit what hides the truth. Moreover, this helps to identify the meaning of life. Why is it important to identify the meaning of life? How to do it? The significance of finding the meaning or truth of life is that it brings a person to consciousness and makes them realise the purpose of life. It has to be done through self-realisation. There are several occasions when humans ponder with self-questioning and obliviousness. At those points, the meaning or truth aids one with the acts of consciousness to set the path accordingly with the purpose realised. This realisation cannot be achieved solely through thought. It can be realised after experiencing all the odds and interconnections of life. The research paper explores the phases of evolution in search of life's meaning through Hermann Hesse's philosophical fiction, "*Siddhartha*".

**Keywords:** Quest; Finding Meaning; Self-Realization; Consciousness; Reality; Philosophical Fiction and Evolution

## 1. Introduction

Hermann Hesse is a Nobel prize-winning German writer who articulates the duality of 'spirit and nature', 'body and mind', and 'the individual's spiritual search' through his works. Among his works are the remarkable Philosophical fictions that illustrate evolution in the lives of the protagonists. One such novel that depicts the story of a protagonist on a quest for the truth is *Siddhartha*. The word Siddhartha is made up of two words: siddha (achieved) + artha (meaning), which together mean he who has found the meaning or the truth of life. Any attempt to achieve the ideal structure of life loses its way in the complex entities of life. One of the reasons is the interconnectivity of lives and their causes, which displays life as a whole as well as fragmented. The wide view of thought to know the 'truth' of life, the ultimate goal, the wisdom, the enlightenment, the meaning, etc., is possible through the quest for the truth. The reason is that truth cannot be attained with ease, but only through evolution. This evolution encompasses contrasting aspects of life, leading to realisations of every aspect. Though truth is an aspect of thought, the way of approaching is in the real or physical world. This research paper explores the life of the protagonist in his quest for truth across various phases, aiming to highlight the central idea of attaining truth.

### 1. The phase of learning

This phase of learning marks the early stage of Siddhartha's journey to discover the truth within the teachings through learning and practice. The teachers, the lessons, the practices and their results will be discussed below.

#### 1.1. Siddhartha – an ascetic

Siddhartha, as a brahmin, learnt the art of contemplation and the duty of meditation with his friend Govinda. He was recognised as a clear thinker who could even take part in witty discussions. From doing the duties of a brahmin to a proud son to his parents, from an admirable friend of Govinda to the expected love of young brahmin girls, Siddhartha pleased everyone's heart, but he could not please himself. This is the reason Siddhartha starts the quest for truth. He thought as,

“... the mind wasn't satisfied, the soul wasn't quiet, the heart was stilled. The purifications were nice, but they were just water, and didn't wash away sins; they didn't cure the mental thirst or allay his heart's anxiety”.

To probe into it, the clear thinker who lives in a linear pattern or a perfectionist state of reality finds a gap that is to be filled with truth that gives meaning to his life. This realisation of discontentment in his mind became the reason to leave his family, his people, and his inherited identity behind to begin his quest for truth.

#### 1.2. Siddhartha – a Samana

Siddhartha, who leaves his inherited self, his part of existence as a son of his family and a brahmin of his people, joined the Samana s. He followed the guru's order. Even though he left his inherited self behind when he joined the Samana, he learnt to transcend the 'Self' within the Samana completely. The Samana's teachings of attaining nirvana are his goal. “Among all the Samanas in existence, no one will reach

nirvana...we can deceive ourselves. But the fundamental thing, that way of ways, we do not find".

The above quote represents Siddhartha's learning during his Samana life. He practised self-denial by suffering his body in the sunlight. Then, he practised contemplating various beings as a soul within it and experienced each life. Their goal is to disappear completely after their death. However, they re-enter their body. This they call the upward spiral of existence, that is, they will move upwards in being and keep coming back where they began or exist. Siddhartha, who had left his identity and denied himself, still struggled to escape existence and found that it was not the path to truth. There he left the Samana to continue his quest for the truth.

### 1.3. Siddhartha- the observer

Siddhartha and Govinda learned about Gotama, the exalted, who had attained nirvana, never returned to the cycle of existence, and also gained the wisdom of truth. Siddhartha attended his teachings. He taught the four central doctrines and the Eightfold Path, which emphasised salvation through suffering. The teachings were clear and firm. Then what makes Siddhartha leave Gotama? According to Siddhartha, the teachings were about the causes and effects concerning a particular, but the quest towards truth will differ with every individual.

Also, his speculation was about 'a small gap', which can break the world from flowing as a perfect chain. For that, Gotama replied that the teachings were to attain salvation through suffering and no further purpose of knowledge. These were the lessons Siddhartha learned from Gotama. Moreover, Siddhartha concluded it as,

"You have found salvation from death. It has come to you in the course of your search, on your path, through thoughts, through meditation, through realisation, through enlightenment. It has not come to you using teachings! Moreover—so are my thoughts, oh exalted one..." (Siddhartha to Gotama)

The above is a realisation towards a realisation. At the end of the phase of learning, Siddhartha realised learning was no longer leading him towards the truth, but only his experience. There Siddhartha decided to stop learning from teachers. Moreover, he went on, leaving Govinda, who found refuge with Gotama's teachings. Even though he decided to walk away from teaching, the knowledge gained has left a lasting impact on his subconscious. The art of contemplation and meditation as an ascetic, the practice of denying the self as a Samana, the connectivity of salvation from the suffering of Gotama were all helpful in creating his most important quality of 'to think, to wait and to fast' in his later life.

### 2. Phase of experience

After Siddhartha decided to move from getting lessons, he thought, "I was willing to dissect myself and peel off its layers, to find the core of all peels in its unknown interior, the atman, life, the divine part, the ultimate part. However, I have lost myself in the process". The above thought has directed Siddhartha to find himself on the path of experience with the help of all his senses, which is as follows.

## 2.1. Love as a craft

The awakening after he left the teachings has changed his perspective on life. His perspective of a meaningless world as a Samana changed to approaching it as a child. This approach, as a child, gave him the freedom to live. Everything seems beautiful to him. In that way, he saw a courtesan named Kamala and wanted to learn love from her, saying that "How then should I not reach the goal which I have set for you? You'll see that I will learn quickly, Kamala;". Siddhartha courageously approached her. Following Kamala's guidance, with his wit and patience, Siddhartha successfully entered the world of senses, beginning with the exploration of love.

### 2.1.1. Siddhartha - the sansara

The evidence exists to participate with other beings in the system of life. It had been a long time since Siddhartha left his identity as a brahmin and wandered with self-denial. When he managed to get Kamala's love, she asked him about her demands and how to fulfil them. Siddhartha, still a composed human and immature to the world of senses, started participating by joining as a financial partner to Kamaswami, the merchant. Siddhartha practised the existence without attaching to it initially. However, existence tends to multiply. With that, he became a merchant. Initially, it was for Kamala's sake, and then he was adapted into it. The multitudinous aspect of existence came, and by which he gradually turned off his call of consciousness on his quest for the truth.

"He had been captured by the world, by lust, covetousness, indolence, and ultimately by that vice which he had once despised and mocked as the most foolish of all the vices: greed, property, possessions, and riches had also finally ensnared him;".

To distract, he gambled, watched a woman dance, and was involved in physical pleasure, which made him feel completely worldly. The lust, the money, and the temper he adopted by his existence have redirected him. There, his quest for the truth lost its way in his phase of senses. However, Siddhartha was exploring the other side of the world and human life.

## 2.2. Siddhartha reborn

Siddhartha, who had been the ascetic, the Samana, the observer who always detached himself from existence and the temperance of the world, for learning love connected to the multitudes of existence and practised it as a craft. The primary question to investigate is whether this phase of senses will be a milestone in his quest for truth. After denying himself during the phase of learning, he felt he knew nothing about himself, and then he embraced himself in the phase of senses. He not only came to know himself but also the world and the existence of beings in life. It transformed the denial into acceptance, the hate into love, and brought it to his consciousness, which his senses had yet to perceive. This fullness of senses created the discontentment similar to his experience as an ascetic, a Samana and an observer with self-denial. There awoke the call of consciousness with a dream of a dying parrot inside Kamala's cage.

“...This is why he had to endure these hated years— the revulsion, the lesson, the pointlessness of a dreary and wasted life— endure up to the end, up to the bitter despair, until Siddhartha, the lust-filled and greedy one, could also die. He had died, and a new Siddhartha had awakened out of the sleep”.

Siddhartha identified his quest as losing his way. He went away, leaving his craft of love and worldly life as a merchant. The phase of experience created the same discontentment caused while learning, which made him suffer and took him to the next level of search for the truth.

### 3. The phase of existence

In this phase, Siddhartha not only encountered but also experienced the nature of reality. Siddhartha, who had learnt and experienced all these days, was not attached to any worldly aspects. However, the enlightenment, the truth, and the wisdom can be felt along the interconnectivity and entirety. This phase will be analysed as follows.

#### 3.1. Kamala's death

Siddhartha was then a completely acknowledged being in both ideal and real life. He was a whole soul, but still weighed with discontentment. There awaited his return of fate, which is the circle of existence. When Kamala died from a snake bite, leaving Siddhartha to their son.

“He saw his face and hers at the same time as they were young, with red lips, fiery eyes. The feeling of all this being both present and real, the feeling of eternity, filled every aspect of his being. He felt in this hour, more deeply than ever before, that every life was indestructible, that every moment was eternity”

Even though his love as a craft with Kamala ended long before, he felt the eternity of his deeds in that moment. After Kamala died, he completed the funeral with Vasudeva, his friend. However, the craft he has done has yielded a reality: his son, born to Kamala. The real participation in existence began from that moment.

#### 3.2. Siddhartha and his son

Unlike Siddhartha, the little boy had been brought up with riches and pampering by his mother. The accidental shift to a mere wildlife was unbearable to him. However, Siddhartha, who has almost experienced all the phases and the wisdom of experiences, wanted the young Siddhartha to be with him in this life of peace. A young mind cannot settle in peace, but with young thoughts itself. Vasudeva, who watched everything calmly, clarified to Siddhartha,

“I'm watching you torment yourself, and I see that you're grieving...the young bird is accustomed to a different life, ... water joins water, youth joins youth— your son is not in a place to prosper”.

For the first time, Siddhartha grieved for the love of his son. The attachment reminded him of his father, and it was like a reversal of fate. With his son, with whom he was attached to the world. The essential quality, 'to think, to wait and to fast' that he

earned through arduous learning and practising started altering in reality. Siddhartha compelled his young son to be with him. However, he eloped, just as Siddhartha once left his father. "...it still seemed to him as if these childlike people were his brothers. Their vanities, desires for possession, and ridiculous traits were no longer laughable to him".

The thought made him realise that the people in existence were superior to wise men because of the unrelenting pursuit of necessities. The realisation made him realise that his goal of search is nothing more than the readiness of the soul. Siddhartha, as a father, realised more than an ascetic, a Samana and an observer. So, the phase of existence is the milestone that brought Siddhartha to entirety and harmony.

4. The truth. According to Everett W. Knight in his book *Literature Considered as Philosophy*,

Truth is not arrived at (contrary to scientific belief) by analysis and dissection: for example, the idea of a sphere is not derived from that of a semicircle revolved around its diameter; on the contrary, it is because the essence "sphere" is accessible to the mind, that any thought about sphere is at all possible;". As a Samana, Siddhartha dissected each layer of his self by denying it, intending to find the truth at its core. In his phase of learning, he exercised all his learned strategies and failed. In the phase of experience, it was his self that had lost its way to find the truth. However, this attachment to existence through his son is the point of connecting him to the entirety. The entirety, the flow, the interconnectivity, and the unity are the knowledge of truth, which Siddhartha found through meditating on the river. All the voices belonged together: the lamentation of yearning and the laughter of the wise one, the scream of rage and the moaning of the dying ones. All was one, and everything was intertwined and connected and entangled together a thousand times over. Moreover, together—all the voices, all the goals, all suffering, pleasure, good, and evil—together, it was all the world.

The above represents the culmination of his quest for the truth, illustrating the entire flow of life towards truth and the interconnectivity between each element. Through every aspect of life, the self perceives the truth, but not as a whole. When the self evolves to perceive it as a whole, like visualising the entirety and intertwining as above, is the moment of perceiving the wisdom of truth.

### Conclusion

In the words of Merleau Ponty, "...we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise, we should not be looking for it...". Whatever Siddhartha does in his whole journey is his search for truth. His mind perceived, and his senses lived all sufferings and salvation. The exact moment was when his self flowed into the entirety and submerged itself into it. He asked Gotama a question about the 'small gap' that breaks the law of uniformity. The truth is, whatever is attached will find a way to be detached, and whatever is detached will find a way to be attached, all along with the unity of life paradoxically. The quest for the truth is like the story of a golden egg-laying duck. Each aspect of life will embed its part in the golden egg. It grows with every evolution of

being. Thus, one cannot attain the truth by dissection, but through being or realising in each progress of evolution.

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