

SIDDHARTHA

In the book *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse, the main character Siddhartha had many teachers along his quest for happiness. Throughout his life he denounced teachers and their teachings. In his last meeting with his lifelong friend, Govinda, he mentions five in which he was indebted: a beautiful courtesan, a rich merchant, a dice player, a Buddhist monk, and Vasudeva.

The first of these teachers along his way was Kamala a beautiful courtesan. Kamala taught him the wonderful pleasures of love and the importance of wealth and riches in society. "It [had] never been my experience that a Samana from the woods should come to me and desire to learn from me. Never has a Samana with long hair and an old torn loin cloth come to me. Many young men come to me, including Brahmin's sons but they come to me in fine clothes, in fine shoes; there is scent in their hair and money in their purses. That is how these young men come to me, O Samana."² These teachings in which Kamala placed upon him helped him to seek out the riches and wealth that would supposedly bring him happiness.

Another of the people who Siddhartha obtained knowledge from was the rich merchant Kamaswami. Kamaswami taught Siddhartha the secrets of making money and living the life of a rich man. While working for Kamaswami many of Siddhartha's values stayed intact but, slowly these values began to slip away. In many ways Kamaswami taught Siddhartha the dark side of life.

As the days went on Siddhartha began hating himself more and more. He viewed his riches as worthless, for they did not truly bring him happiness. Slowly he began squandering his money playing dice. He won thousands and lost thousands in order to reach the high he felt when he carelessly bet his money away. This taught him the worthless value of money, for money only brought more and more sadness.

Finally after rejecting this life of sin he vowed to leave the city and never return. As he retreated into the forest he decided to go to the river. At the river he found his friend Govinda, who had watched over Siddhartha while he had slept. Govinda was now a Buddhist monk who searched for happiness. I believe this showed Siddhartha that their two lives were still very similar. They both still sought happiness and they were both in transitory.

The final teacher along Siddhartha's quest for happiness was Vasudeva, the ferryman. Vasudeva taught Siddhartha how to listen to people and the river which in turn helped Siddhartha on the road to happiness. "You will learn it, but not from me. The river knows everything; one can learn everything from it. You have already learned from the river that it is good to strive downwards, to sink, to seek the depths. The rich and distinguished Siddhartha will become a rower; Siddhartha the learned Brahmin will become a ferryman. You have also learned this from the river. You will learn the other thing too."²

Throughout this book Siddhartha distrusts teachers, but in the end he becomes one. Although he shy's away from this classification, towards the end he begins to share the knowledge he has gained throughout the many different phases of his life.

