

Part One

..... Everyone loves young Siddhartha, who is handsome, respectful, quick to learn. His father, a Brahmin, teaches him the ways of Hinduism, and his mother sings to him. The maidens of the town hold him in the highest favor. When the wise men gather for discussions, Siddhartha is there to take part. He already knows how to meditate using the sacred word [Om](#). Even more, he can feel the presence of the Atman, the universal soul, within him. His bearing, his decorum, his gentle voice, his surpassing intelligence, and his dark and inquiring eyes endear him to all. His best friend, Govinda, knows that Siddhartha is special, and he is always at Siddhartha's side to serve him and learn from him.

..... Oddly, Siddhartha himself is restless. Even though he enjoys the abundant love of his parents and everyone else around him, even though his father and the wise old Brahmins of the town impart to him the best of all that they know, even though he practices Hindu rituals and reads the Hindu scriptures, there is an emptiness in part of his soul. And he begins to question what he has learned.

Was it really [Prajapati](#) who had created the world? Was it not the [Atman](#). He, the only one, the singular one? Were the gods not creations, created like me and you, subject to time, mortal? Was it therefore good, was it right, was it meaningful and the highest occupation to make offerings to the gods? For whom else were offerings to be made, who else was to be worshipped but Him, the only one, the Atman? And where was Atman to be found, where did He reside, where did his eternal heart beat, where else but in one's own self, in its innermost part, in its indestructible part, which everyone had in himself? But where, where was this self, this innermost part, this ultimate part?

..... One day he and Govinda sit under a Banyan tree to practice meditating. But after the time arrives for their evening [ablutions](#), he remains lost in thought—hardly breathing—as he thinks the holy word, *Om*, and his soul tries to drink in understanding. Shortly thereafter, three [ascetics](#)—Samanas, they are called—pass through the town. They are thin and worn and dusty, “almost naked, scorched by the sun, surrounded by loneliness. . . strangers and lank jackals in the realm of humans.” That evening, Siddhartha informs Govinda that he will join them. Govinda, surprised, realizes Siddhartha has made his decision to go his own way in the world. And, of course, wherever Siddhartha goes, Govinda will go.

When Siddhartha tells his father of his plans, his father becomes angry and refuses permission. Upset, his father cannot sleep. Several times he goes outside in the darkness to think and notices that Siddhartha remains in the spot where he had informed his father of his decision. Hours pass. Still Siddhartha does not move. At dawn, his father relents, and Siddhartha leaves with Govinda.

..... Hurrying along, they catch up with the Samanas, who accept both young men. Siddhartha gives away his clothes, keeping only a loincloth. In time, he grows thin from fasting and becomes bitter about life. It is then that he decides that he must empty himself of desire and longing—of all feeling—so that he dies to himself and gives birth to the inmost part of his being. He learns to endure extreme heat, cold, and thirst. When he brushes against thorns, his skin bleeds, but he remains rigid until the pain subsides. He trains himself to calm his heartbeat, and he learns to empty his mind of memories so that he is—at least for a time—a non-self. Eventually, the self returns again and, with it, the human feelings and sensations that he has been trying to escape. Then he repeats the process, hoping eventually to achieve a permanent state of selflessness. Govinda does what Siddhartha does, and together they evaluate their progress. On occasion, they beg for food for themselves and for the other Samanas.

..... But Siddhartha is not satisfied. He observes that even an ox-cart driver who drinks rice wine after a day's work can escape from the world of the senses. He also notes that the oldest of the Samanas is sixty and has not yet achieved the fullness of enlightenment, which enables a person to overcome suffering and end the cycle of birth, life, death, rebirth, life, death, and so on. (Hindus call this cycle *samsara*.) That Samana will go on searching for full enlightenment but never find it. Siddhartha says the same will happen to him unless he ceases learning in the conventional Hindu way and instead pursues a different path.

..... So, after living with the Samanas for three years, Siddhartha and Govinda strike out again. Siddhartha tells his friend of a rumor he heard about a man named Gotama who had achieved what Siddhartha seeks: complete mastery of the senses and a permanent state of selflessness, enabling him to overcome *samsara*. He has no home, no wife, no possessions. As he and his followers wander the land, the rumor says, the high and the mighty present themselves to him and become his students. They call him the Buddha, meaning enlightened one.

..... In a village one day, Govinda learns that the Buddha actually exists; a young man from Magadha has told him that he has seen the Buddha and listened to him while he was teaching. After he tells Siddhartha the news, both young men decide to seek out the Buddha and he

what he has to say. When Siddhartha informs the oldest Samana of his and Govinda's decision to leave the group, the old man becomes angry and curses. Siddhartha then stands directly in front of the man and, with a penetrating gaze, turns him mute and motionless. After a few moments, the Samana bids him and Govinda good fortune and wishes them a happy journey. On their travels, they hear that the Buddha is in the town of Savatthi (written in the novel with one ð). When they go there, an old woman who gives them food tells them Gotama stays in a grove called Jetavana, a gift to him and his followers from a wealthy merchant, Anathapindika. They can stay the night there, she says, for the Buddha welcomes pilgrims. On their way, they encounter followers of the Buddha, as well as many other pilgrims, and thus have no trouble finding the grove. At dawn, they are surprised to see so many people gathered in one place. Many of the monks are leaving with alms dishes to beg food that they will bring back for their only meal, taken at midday. Siddhartha recognizes the Buddha ("a simple man in a yellow robe," the narrator says) even though he has never seen him before. As the Buddha also leaves with his alms dish, Siddhartha perceives him as a man of deep inner calm who is a reservoir of truth.

. In the evening, Siddhartha, Govinda, and others assemble while the Buddha presents a lesson. The only way to escape the suffering of the world, he says, is to follow his teachings—in particular, the [eightfold path](#). He reviews doctrines, gives examples, repeats important points. He is like a light from the sky. After he finishes, many ask for acceptance into his community, including Govinda, and the Buddha receives them. But Siddhartha decides to leave Govinda and the community and go a separate way.

. Walking in the grove the next morning, Siddhartha comes upon the Buddha and tells him he has been privileged to listen to his teachings but will be moving on. In explaining his decision, Siddhartha says,

You have found salvation from death. It has come to you in the course of your own search, on your own path, through thoughts, through meditation, through realizations, through enlightenment. It has not come to you by means of teachings! . . . This is why I am continuing my travels—not to seek other, better teachings, for I know there are none, but to depart from all teachings and all teachers and to reach my goal by myself or to die. (Part 1, "Gotama")

. After Siddhartha goes off on his own, he reviews his life up to this point. So far, he has been trying to peel away the layers of himself to get at the core—the Atman, which is part of a universal soul. In so doing, he has been escaping from himself, "fleeing himself," the narrator says. Through all his experiences, he really learned nothing about himself. Now, he decides, he will learn about himself, and he will be his own teacher.

Part Two

. No longer will Siddhartha try to fathom a hidden world beyond the material; he will be part of the world. He will drink in its beauty, take part in its pleasures. When he comes to a river, a ferryman takes him across, expecting no payment, and wishes his passenger good will. Siddhartha then passes through a village and comes to a stream on the other side of it. There, a young woman washes clothes. When she sees Siddhartha, they exchange idle talk and then she makes a subtle advance that reveals her carnal desire. Siddhartha, aroused, kisses her bosom but suddenly withdraws after a voice in him forbids him to continue this encounter. He turns and walks away.

. Just before evening, he arrives at a grove on the outskirts of a city. Servants are carrying a beautiful young woman into the grove on a canopied chair. She wears a garment of green and gold. When their eyes meet, she smiles slightly. However, the servants look with disdain upon him, for he still looks the part of a poor Samana. On his way into the city, he learns from a passerby that the woman is a courtesan named Kamala, who owns a house in the city. Siddhartha enters the city, looks around, and makes friends with a barber's assistant in a temple of Vishnu. He stays the night near boats by a river, and in the morning goes to the barber's shop for a haircut, shave, and anointment with oil. He then bathes in the river.

. In the afternoon, he again sees Kamala at the grove. After she inquires about his changed appearance, he informs her that he had been a Samana for three years but now has abandoned that calling. Consequently, he no longer needs to look like an ascetic. What is more, he no longer needs to look away when he sees a beautiful woman. Boldly he asks her to teach him the "joys of love." But he is not yet ready, she says. He must have money and elegant clothing, and he must bring gifts for her. He then asks her if she will kiss him if he composes a poem for her. Yes, she says, if she likes it. Siddhartha ponders for a moment, then recites a poem that flatters her. Kamala claps. When she kisses him, demonstrating her skill as a courtesan, Siddhartha notes to himself that he is already learning from her.

. Before he leaves, she gives him a gift: white clothing for the upper part of his body. She promises to speak to him again the following day. Siddhartha already knows the location of her

house. When he appears there the next day, she tells him that she has recommended him for employment in the business of a wealthy merchant, Kamaswami, who lends money at interest and buys and sells rice, wool, linen, and other goods. If Siddhartha conducts himself properly, he will one day become wealthy himself, for Kamaswami is old and lazy and is ready to pass on responsibility to someone else.

.....Kamaswami, pleased that Siddhartha can read and write, hires him to write letters and business contracts and invites him to live in his sumptuous home. In time, Siddhartha makes great sums of money and lives a life of pleasure. He eats the best foods, wears elegant clothes, buys his own house with a team of servants, keeps a garden on the outskirts of the city, travels about on his own palanquin, and receives the attentions of Kamala, who regards him as a favorite. In his new lifestyle, he welcomes other pleasures as well, including gambling and drinking.

.....As the years pass, vices overtake him—greed, envy, lust. Eventually, the material world begins to lose its luster. When he rolls the dice, he bets enormous sums—a way of showing disdain for his riches. He wins vast sums, then loses vast sums; he loses possessions and wins them back. And so the cycle goes.

.....One evening, while spending time with Siddhartha, Kamala asks him about the Buddha. After Siddhartha speaks of him at length, she says that she may one day join the Buddha, offering him her garden as a gift. Later, when lying with her, Siddhartha notices the little lines in her face. Her youth is running out; she is tired. He himself, now in his forties, exhibits gray hairs; he too is tired. After returning home, he spends time with dancing girls and drinks heavily. Later, he has trouble sleeping, for he is disgusted with the smell of wine and perfume and with what he has become. Toward dawn, he dozes off and dreams of Kamala's bird, which lives in a golden cage. It has stopped singing. When he goes to the cage to see why, he finds the bird lying flat and stiff. It is dead.

.....After waking, Siddhartha goes to his garden and meditates. He remains there all day. When he finally comes out, he decides to strike out anew. Leaving behind his house and other possessions, he moves on, not even stopping to say goodbye to Kamala or Kamaswami.

.....Passing through the forest, he arrives at the same river he crossed years before. Now deeply troubled, he stands by the river, looks down at his image in the water, and spits at it. He considers drowning himself to end his suffering. Then the sacred word comes to him—*Om*. Immediately, he realizes how wrong it would be to kill himself. He repeats the word again and again, then collapses and falls into a deep sleep.

.....When he awakens, refreshed, he sees a monk in a yellow robe. Despite his shaven head, Siddhartha recognizes him—Govinda—but Govinda does not recognize Siddhartha. Govinda tells him he has been sleeping in a dangerous place, where there are snakes and other wild animals. Apparently Govinda had been sitting there to watch over Siddhartha. When the monk gets up to leave, Siddhartha says, "Farewell, Govinda." Surprised, Govinda asks how he knows his name.

.....Siddhartha then reveals his identity and says he is on a pilgrimage. He tells Govinda what has happened to him since they last saw each other and says he is now on a new journey to find himself. After Govinda moves on, Siddhartha seeks out and finds the ferryman who treated him kindly about twenty years before. After they talk for a while, the ferryman recognizes Siddhartha and introduces himself as Vasudeva. Siddhartha offers him his fine clothes in exchange for a ride across the river and a simple loincloth. Goodly Vasudeva cooperates and invites Siddhartha to stay the night in his hut. To Siddhartha, the river holds mysteries, and he tells Vasudeva that he would like to live near it and become Vasudeva's assistant. Inside the hut, Vasudeva gives his guest bread, water, and mango fruit. Then they sit on a log before the river while Siddhartha recounts the story of his life. It is very late when Siddhartha finishes his tale, to which Vasudeva listened raptly. Before they retire, Vasudeva says Siddhartha will learn much from the river in the days ahead. "It knows everything, the river, everything can be learned from it," Vasudeva says. "See, you've already learned this from the water too, that it is good to strive downwards, to sink, to seek depth. The rich and elegant Siddhartha is becoming an oarsman's servant, the learned Brahmin Siddhartha becomes a ferryman . . ." (Part 2, "The Ferryman").

.....Years pass as Siddhartha lives in contentment with Vasudeva.

.....Meanwhile, Kamala has given up her life as a courtesan, donated her garden to Buddha's monks, and begun following his teachings. She now has a son, who was sired by Siddhartha before he left Kamala. He is unaware of the existence of the child, who is named after his father.

.....When word spreads across the land that the Buddha is dying, she and the boy—like so many others from around the land—go to be with him. Along the river, the boy becomes unruly. Tired and irritable, he wants to return home, complaining that it is no concern of his that some holy man is dying. Not far from Vasudeva's ferry, the boy insists that they stop to rest. By this time, Kamala herself is also tired, so they halt their journey.

.....While the boy eats a banana, Kamala lies down. Shortly after she closes her eyes, a snake bites her and she screams. They run along the bank, looking for people and shouting for help. When they near Vasudeva's ferry, she collapses. Vasudeva, who has heard their cries,

carries her to his boat and takes her and the boy to his hut. Siddhartha, who is lighting a stove fire, recognizes her. Seeing himself in the boy's face, he realizes that he is his son.

.....Before she dies, Kamala tells Siddhartha that she can see that he has found peace at last. And Siddhartha tells her that she, too, has found peace.

.....After she dies, Siddhartha keeps the boy with him. The child, age eleven, spends many days mourning the loss of his mother, the only parent he knew—one who pampered him and saw to his every need and desire. Realizing little Siddhartha will have trouble adjusting to a life without the material things he is used to, his father is patient with him. He gives him appetizing meals and avoids forcing him to do chores when he resists. But the boy refuses to adapt and refuses to accept his father's love. He disobeys him and insults him, and one day says he would rather be a criminal and "go to hell" than be like his father.

.....The morning after this outburst, the boy is nowhere to be found. Vasudeva and Siddhartha then discover that the money they had saved from their ferry business is missing. They also observe that their boat is on the opposite bank. Siddhartha wants to pursue the boy and bring him back. But Vasudeva tries to talk him out of it, saying the boy knows his own mind and is now old enough to get along. But Siddhartha pursues him, traveling all the way to the garden that was once Kamala's. There, he begins to believe it would be useless to reclaim the boy. For a long time, he sits and meditates, completely losing himself in his thoughts. Then the hand of Vasudeva, who had followed Siddhartha, touches his shoulder, and Siddhartha returns with him to their river hut. But he does not readily get over the absence of his son. Each time he sees a child, he wonders why he has been deprived of the joy of living with his own child.

.....Siddhartha is now less proud than he was in his youth. All his experiences—the good ones and the bad ones, as well as the wisdom he has gained living a simple life by river—have made him a better man and brought him closer to achieving full enlightenment.

.....One day, he imagines that he hears the voices of his father and son and of Kamala and Govinda—of everyone he has ever heard or seen, of everyone in the entire world—merging in the river. The river is all life flowing toward a goal. It sings "the great song of the thousand voices," which consists of this word, *Om*—perfection.

....."Do you hear?" says Vasudeva.

.....Siddhartha hears. And he smiles. Siddhartha's "self had flown into oneness" (Part 2, "Om"). He has achieved enlightenment. Vasudeva hears the same sound in the same way, and he also achieves nirvana. Overjoyed, he decides it is time to leave and go off into the forest to enter "the oneness" (Part 2, "Om").

.....Meanwhile, Govinda has heard tales of a wise old ferryman who plies his trade only a day's journey away. Over the years, Govinda has learned a great deal in his pursuit of perfection, and younger monks admire him. Still, he yearns to know more, and so he seeks out the ferryman. When he finds him, he asks him what he should search for to achieve enlightenment. The old ferryman, Siddhartha, tells him that he must not search for anything, for a search means seeking a goal. The best strategy is to be free, to have no goal, Siddhartha says. When Siddhartha recalls the time long ago when he slept on the riverbank and a man came by and guarded him against snakes, Govinda realizes that he is speaking with his old friend. He expresses his happiness at seeing him again.

.....That night, Govinda stays in Siddhartha's hut.

.....The next day, when Siddhartha and Govinda continue their conversation, Siddhartha says he does not believe in words or lessons but in actions and in observing the "things" of the world. When the time comes for Govinda to leave, he asks Siddhartha to give him some bit of wisdom to take with him to guide him on his struggle to attain enlightenment. Siddhartha then says, "Kiss my forehead, Govinda!"

.....When Govinda does so, he sees in Siddhartha innumerable faces—of men, women, fish, crocodiles, elephants—"and all of these figures and faces rested, flowed, generated themselves, floated along and merged with each other. . ." (Part 2, "Om"). They are all Siddhartha. And Govinda, at this moment, achieves the enlightenment he seeks.