*Siddhartha:* Spiritual Rebirth through Suffering

Herman Hesse's novel, *Siddhartha* revolves around the physical, mental, and spiritual journey of Siddhartha whilst he struggles to attain enlightenment in a chaotic world. As a young Brahmin, Siddhartha thirsts for knowledge, however he finds that the religious texts and rituals he mastered cannot answer his questions about the universe. Hoping that the teachings of others will do so, Siddhartha abandons his idyllic village and enters his quest for individuation. When Siddhartha is introduced to the world of Samsara -- the cycle of mundane existence -- with promise of immediate sensual pleasure, he becomes ensnared, forgetting his spiritual crusade. This world teaches him of materialism, suffering, and disillusionment, bringing Siddharta to complete despair. It is only when Siddhartha remembers his purpose and is spiritually reborn that he can continue his journey. Hesse uses the motif Samsara to develop the false reality of materialism which causes Siddhartha disillusionment and suffering while ultimately revealing that his spiritual rebirth enables his enlightenment.

Samsara teaches Siddhartha that disillusionment and suffering are part of the false reality of materialism. Siddhartha’s whole life is changed when he enters into this new world. He experiences love, gambling, property, and pleasure that distract him from the Self understanding he gained during his time with the samanas. Yet, as time passes Siddhartha begins to hate that he cannot assimilate into this community and become ordinary. When Siddhartha reflects on his experience he realizes that, “he envied them the one thing that he lacked and they had: the sense of importance with which they lived their lives, the depth of their pleasures and sorrows, the anxious but sweet happiness of their continual power to love,” (p. 77). Siddhartha believed he was superior to these child-like beings because he knew his purpose, however, his psychological isolation prevents him from experiencing the blissful ignorance of living spiritually unconscious. His envy for these people transforms him, and instead of their happiness he learns “the unpleasant things from them which he despised..and...slowly the soul sickness of the rich crept over him, ” (p. 78). Siddhartha is lost and in despair because he has allowed this materialistic world to corrupt him. This World of “[desire] had only been a game to him, a dance, a comedy which one watches...This game was called Samsara a game which...he could play no longer,” (p. 84). This game, signifying nothing, has caused him disillusionment and suffering, and Siddhartha has realized that he must leave this game, this false reality, and return to his journey.

Yet the disillusionment and suffering Siddhartha experiences as part of the distorted world of materialism enable him to awaken spiritually, without which he would never have attained enlightenment. When Siddhartha leaves the town, he stops by a river, and filled with despair, considers drowning himself. Just as he is about to, he comes to a realization: There was purpose to everything he had done; “That was why he had to undergo those horrible years, suffer nausea, learn the lesson of the madness of an empty, futile life till the end, till he reached bitter despair, so that Siddhartha the pleasure-monger and Siddhartha the man of property could die. He had died and a new Siddhartha had awakened from his sleep,” (p. 100). Thus, Siddhartha’s suffering is justified; he is born anew. His experiences however, revealed that he “was transitory, all forms [of himself] were transitory, but today he was young, he was a child and he was very happy” (p. 100). His experiences with the Samanas and with Samsara were all fluid, changing and flowing, and as Siddhartha rediscovers himself again, he finds his innocence and happiness, and is ready to complete his journey.

Siddhartha’s experiences in this world of materialism cause him a great deal of pain, but through that suffering and disillusionment he restores his spirituality, thus making enlightenment attainable.