

The different paths



**ASSIGN
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The Different Paths

In the novels *The Guide*, by R. K. Narayan, *The Harp of Burma*, by Michio Takeyama, and *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse, all of the main characters encounter issues regarding their identities. In *The Guide*, Raju tries to find his identity by abandoning his old identity in search of a new one. In *The Harp of Burma*, Mishuzima also abandons his old identity to find a new one, though he does it because of his new beliefs. In *Siddhartha*, Siddhartha finds his identity through experiences in his life. Whilst Raju, Mishuzima, and Siddhartha struggle with exploring their identity, Raju and Mishuzima try to find theirs by rejecting their old identity, and Siddhartha uses numerous experiences in his life to find his. The way that Siddhartha goes about finding his identity discloses the most about identity because he can learn from every experience he has. Every experience that Siddhartha has faced that he finds doesn't get him closer to finding his identity he rules out and moves on, like crossing off a list.

Although how Raju goes about finding his identity seems successful, there are multiple flaws about it and are issues about how committed he is. Siddhartha's way is more successful than Raju's, and the author shows us the Siddhartha does in fact understand his identity when Siddhartha reaches enlightenment. Siddhartha's quest is to understand himself and the world around him, while Raju only switches his identity because he was ashamed and wanted to forget about who he used to be. For the majority of the book, Raju fakes being a "holy man" and is just there to get by. As stated in *The Guide*, "I am no saint. Velan uttered many sounds of protest. Raju felt sorry to be shattering his faith; but it was the only way in which he could hope to

escape the ordeal" (Narayan, 87). Raju admits that everything he has done since "becoming" a holy man was fake, and he was just a regular person. Everything that Raju told them he never really took the time to think thoughtfully on it. He never focused about finding his identity until the end of the book when he is prepared to sacrifice himself for the people of the town. It took him a crisis to change the way he viewed things. An external force made him have to focus on himself and what he could do to help the people he now cared about. Raju's commitment to finding out who he was only came at the very end and it wasn't entirely on his own. The drought that was ravaging through his town made him. Siddhartha on the other hand, finds his identity through his own will, but is aided throughout the way by people who he meets on his journey. As stated before, Siddhartha's goal in life is to find out who he really is, to be able to understand the self and the world, and to get past his ego. "" And Govinda saw that this mask-like smile, this smile of unity over the flowing forms, this smile of simultaneousness over the thousands of births and deaths-this smile of Siddhartha-was exactly the same as the calm, delicate, impenetrable, perhaps gracious, perhaps mocking, wise, thousand-fold smile of Gotama, the Buddha, as he perceived it with awe a hundred times" (Hesse, 131). The author shows us that Siddhartha has in fact reached enlightenment, he has found his identity and understood the self. That was Siddhartha's goal in the end, to reach enlightenment and understand the self. Siddhartha's way got him to his identity, but Raju didn't get as close as Siddhartha to finding his.

Mishuzima tries to find his identity in a similar way to Raju, but Mishuzima takes his seriously. However, Siddhartha's way still got him closer to his

identity than Mishuzima. After being caught and taken as a prisoner of war in Burma, he was sent to try and get the remaining Japanese soldiers to surrender. As it turns out, Mishuzima witnessed a large amount of dead Japanese soldiers unburied just lying there, and he couldn't just walk past them. At this point in the book, Mishuzima forgets and throws out his old identity to become a monk in Burma. Mishuzima left everything and everyone he knew behind to pursue his newfound identity as a holy man and to find who he is. "As I look back on what happened, I feel keenly that we have been too unthinking. We have forgotten to meditate deeply on the meaning of life" (Takeyama, 98). Mishuzima realized in becoming a monk and learning from the time in war that getting to know your identity is the most important thing you can do. Mishuzima shows full commitment to his new identity, but hasn't still fully found his. He's only managed to hide his old one. In contrast, Siddhartha's way still proves to be better than Mishuzima's as Siddhartha finds his identity, but Mishuzima just switches identities.

Although the paths that each character take seem different in many ways, they're all actually alike in one large way. This likeness is shown in where they turn to achieve this goal of understanding the meaning of their identities. Mishuzima, Siddhartha and Raju all turn to a religion to find the meaning. All of them in one way or another use a process that involves a religious position. For example, Mishuzima became a Burmese Monk when he rejected his old identity. Siddhartha left his incredibly high standards of life to follow his religion, to embrace the religion fully. Finally, Raju after being released from prison becomes a sort of a soothsayer, which ends up

crowning him as “ Swami”, which usually refers to a high religious position and as someone the town can depend on.

Throughout the three novels, identity is an important factor. Although Raju and Mishuzima take similar approaches to figuring out their identity, Siddhartha takes an entirely different path to find his identity. Raju and Mishuzima’s ways get them close to finding their identity, but in the end Siddhartha’s path ultimately enables him to find his identity, making it the superior path to Raju and Mishuzima’s.