

# Critical thinking on essays on siddhartha

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



1.

For many people, finding a middle path is one of the more difficult parts of life. It is often easier to embrace one extreme or another, rather than seeking out the tenuous middle ground and keeping to it. In the short term, we are often drawn to a more extreme pattern of behavior; over time, though, we rebel against its limitations and want a way to maintain balance. This is what Gotama referred to as the “middle way,” and during the course of Hesse’s novel, Siddhartha moves from being a confused boy to a wise man who, ultimately, earns the right to replace the ferryman, having become in his own right the wise man who takes his passengers from one shore to the other.

Siddhartha’s journey begins when he joins the ascetic Samanas. When he first sees them, emaciated and clothed only in the ruins of garments, they come to down to ask for alms. Their aim is to reject all satisfaction of the body’s impulses and, thereby, to achieve enlightenment. Siddhartha’s father does not believe that asceticism will bring his son the satisfaction that he seeks, but he cannot change his son’s mind. At first, asceticism suits him; however, he realizes that the Samanas don’t seem any more content than he had been before he joined them.

After leading a successful life as a businessman, enjoying every pleasure available to him (gambling, drinking, sex), including a life with his beautiful wife Kamala, Siddhartha is still not content, and so he returns to the ferryman Vasudeva, whose inner peace makes Siddhartha envious. The secret, according to Vasudeva, was studying the river. Ultimately, after losing his wife to a snakebite and his son to avarice, Siddhartha realizes that,

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just like all water is connected, so are all other life forms, in an unending cycle. All things (happiness and grief, good and evil) are all elements of a larger whole, and all are necessary for an understanding of life. Knowing this brings Siddhartha to the “ Middle Way.”

2.

River – symbol of timelessness/Buddhist notion of life

On his first trip across the river, Siddhartha is not quite ready for the lesson that Vasudeva has to teach him; all he knows is that he does not want the Brahmin life of his childhood, or the ascetic life of the Samanas. As he crosses, though, he is impressed by the contentment that the ferryman has with his life. Even in an occupation that would seem to be fraught with ennui, Vasudeva exudes positive energy and calmness. The secret, of course, is that Vasudeva can live as one with the river.

The river symbolizes the timelessness of all elements of life. The water cycle is a larger metaphor for this unending cycle, as water moves from the river into the sky through evaporation, back to the earth through precipitation, and then soaks and drains its way back down into the river again. There are no changes to this cycle – it moves, inexorably and infinitely. When Siddhartha returns to the ferryman, having abandoned his wealthy life with Kamala because of his dissatisfaction with a life of pleasure, Vasudeva tells him that he must study the river if he is to find contentment.

It's not just the river that goes infinitely, though – all elements of life have an opposite, and those opposites work in harmony to keep all in balance. Anger and happiness; good and evil; war and peace; male and female – all move

together, ideally, in a harmonious dance. If those opposing elements get out of balance, though, life will not result in the peace that leads to nirvana.

3.

Two pairs of fathers and sons appear in Hesse's *Siddhartha*, and both pairings have much to say about the way that family relationships affect the individual, both on the earth and on the path to nirvana. Siddhartha and his own father quarrel early on in the story, as Siddhartha chafes under the boredom and restlessness that his easy Brahmin existence gives him. He is attracted by the rough life that the ascetic Samanas face and wants to join them; his father differs with him, telling him that the Samana way will not lead to nirvana. Even though his father turns out to be correct, Siddhartha does not listen.

Years later, after Siddhartha has joined (and abandoned) the Samanas, and then moved on to a life filled with sensual delights, with Kamala as his partner, and then found a life of pleasure to be, ultimately, just as boring and unfulfilling, only to return to the ferryman for advice on how to find contentment, his own son turns up. Eleven years old at the time, the son was born to Kamala after Siddhartha had left her. Just like his father before him, Siddhartha urges his son to stay with him and Vasudeva, to learn the lessons of contentment so that he, too, can find nirvana. Just like his father before him, Siddhartha was disappointed when his son left – and, unlike Siddhartha, the son commits the indignity of stealing Siddhartha's money.

Family relationships are all part of the tapestry of life, and these relationships must be kept in harmony, internally as well as with one

another. It's not enough, though, to have one's father point the way to nirvana – each of us must find that pathway individually.