

Self-Realization: The Inner Door to Divine Power in the Select Works of Hermann Hesse

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Abstract

Man constantly strives to achieve the purpose and goal of his existence through the innumerable experiences of his life's journey. This journey takes place for those individuals interested in deeper meanings, values and intentions in their life beside considering it just as a new experience. The journey of man begins with birth and ends with death. The gross physical body that serves as a vehicle for the journey has within it the invisible passenger. The universal question that rendezvous man beyond his everyday life is to identify his goal. Self-Realization is an internal journey for speaking to the spirit, touching the soul, and certainly knowing oneself. The purpose of this study is to find the process of self-realization of the main character in the novels by Herman Hesse

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The essence of human spirit can be traced in exploration and all human beings are, in truth, travelers. Knowing the unknown, hearing the unheard and travelling the less-travelled enhance and intensify the meaning of life, make a man an unflawed story-teller. But the best travel perhaps, is the search of life, an inward voyage to meet oneself, a journey from innocence to consciousness, the flow is from action to knowledge to wisdom. Truth is skin deep. It's not on the surface, but it's available to those who are ready to look beyond the physical appearance. Truth is not in the body, but truth enters into the body and can consciously move out of the body. One who has consciousness can experience the truth and live with it. Being is not the limited edition with the body, brain and heart, but much grander in experience, beyond the physical identity of the mind.

The journey of the self-realization is to bring one closer to the truth of life that exists within. Truth is inside and all the outside path of life is directed inward, to connect with the truth. The life is a journey, Human life is not meant merely for eating, drinking and merry-making. Its meaning lies in a journey for something true and meaningful. The theme of self-realization was

important to Hesse because he experienced similar events in life. He was born in Germany in 1877 and raised in a Protestant home with expectations to follow in the footsteps of his forefathers and become a missionary. He did not wish to do so, partly because he was interested in Eastern religions. This personal crisis of the questioning the fundamental beliefs deeply affected Hesse. In the novels *Demian* and *Siddhartha*, Hermann Hesse reveals the influence by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, both psycho-analysts. A personal crisis, which caused Hesse to undergo psycho-analysis with Dr. J.B. Lang led to the writing of *Demian* in 1919. His fascination with Eastern cultures and his trip to India in 1922 directly resulted in the creation of the novel *Siddhartha*.

The fundamental theme of self-realization is evident in both novels. Self-realization involves developing the mind, experiencing life, obtaining wisdom, learning about oneself, coming to an understanding and acceptance of this, and by the end, discovering one's identity. In *Demian* he writes, "There is only one true vocation for everybody - to find the way to himself." (*Demian* 120) Through his struggles, he found that the road to self-realization could only be experienced firsthand and could not be explained in words or taught to others. "... but it becomes clear to him that the way to salvation cannot be taught, that words and creeds are empty sounds, that each man must find the way by himself, the secret of the experience cannot be passed on." (Malthaner 103). This underlying secret was incorporated into the novels *Demian* and *Siddhartha*.

'Self-realization' is the maximum that a person can achieve by using his abilities and skills or it is the fulfillment of one's own objectives and goals. "The truth-consciousness, finding evolutionary Nature ready, has to descend into her and enables her to liberate the supramental principle within her; so, must be created the supramental and spiritual being as the first unveiled manifestation of the truth of the Self and Spirit in the material universe." (Aurobindo 952). It deals with exploring one's own self and accomplishing one's desired goals about one's self. Nature and self of a person are closely linked to each other. "This world wasn't made to be bettered. You were made to be yourselves" (Galbreath 66). Through different experiences from nature, a person is able to realize his own self. Life is a set of goals, as one goal is accomplished there would be another goal waiting. One gains experience through the accomplishment of these goals which leads a person towards self-realization.

Siddhartha and *Demian* is the most notable of Hermann Hesse's literary works. A universally acclaimed novel based on internal conflicts and moral values, Both the novels are logical, emotional and sociological effort by Hermann Hesse. In both novels, Hermann Hesse explores the theme of self-realization by portraying two contrasting worlds, including an all-knowing figure, and involving religion. By developing two contrasting worlds, the protagonist, Siddhartha in *Siddhartha* and Sinclair in *Demian*, is able to explore different philosophies and

unite the two worlds to find a harmonious relationship between them. "...the word is thought transformed into vibration; you are projecting into the air around you something which, before, was only energy. ...The word has more power than many rituals." (Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, 84).

Developing contrasting worlds allows the protagonist to explore different philosophies and unite the two domains to find a harmonious relationship between them. In this way, the protagonist eventually finds his role in society. In *Demian*, the two contrasting worlds are the world of good and world of evil. The good world is represented by family and the household, while the evil world is represented by the world outside of the innocent home.

In *Siddhartha*, the worlds are of the pure and the materialistic. The pure world is represented by the domain of the Samanas, a group of ascetic holy men. The small town of Samsara, where Siddhartha the protagonist, accumulates wealth and experiences romance, represents the materialistic world. In both novels, the protagonist explores each of the separate worlds thoroughly, gaining a variety of experiences and experiencing a variety of emotions. To emphasize the contrast between the worlds, the protagonist shifts from the initial world to the contrasting one and back again. These shifts are voluntarily taken because of the wish to seek the meanings of life. By the end, the protagonist sees that he must live in a world which is a combination of the two. Once he accomplishes this, he lives in harmony with the universe once again. This gives the protagonist the opportunity to explore what he is and what he is not, allowing him to build his own world that includes both elements.

The combination of the worlds is symbolized by the river in *Siddhartha*, and by a new god in *Demian*. It is at the river where Siddhartha discovers the need for both worlds. "I sat here and listened to the river. It has told me a great deal, it has filled me with many great thoughts, with thoughts of unity [of the two worlds]." (Siddhartha 114) The river has elements both of the purity and materialistic. In *Demian*, a newly created deity by the name of Abraxas is a god that is both good and evil. Through Sinclair's concept of this god, he discovers the need for both worlds. "He finds that even the evil things which he had done lately had been necessary as an experience in order to bring him to an understanding of what life really was." (Malthaner, 103) The value of exploring both sides of the world follow Hesse's philosophy of experiencing firsthand in order to discover oneself. In this way, the protagonist explores and achieves harmony between the two worlds. However, the protagonist does not discover the need for both worlds by himself.

On the road to self-discovery, Hesse provides an all-knowing figure to guide the protagonist along the journey. Because of the belief in firsthand experience, the mentors do not reveal all of the secrets to life. In *Demian*, Max is a mentor who helps Sinclair to explore the dark side. Max is a mortal being but he is shown as an eternal entity. His experience in life is

evident in his words to Sinclair, "Examine a man closely enough and you'll soon know more about him than he does himself." (*Demian* 54) At the beginning, Max liberates Sinclair from potential ruin and later helps him to explore new possibilities in life, and new ways of thinking and interpreting. Sinclair commits crimes under the control of Franz Kromer, a local school bully, at the beginning. His future looks very dim until Max appears and eliminates the nuisance. From that point onward, their relationship develops. Sinclair asks Max numerous questions about life and receives many answers. Max is a very surrealistic character who holds the answers to everything and also possesses psychic powers. This mentor also provides a benchmark for Sinclair to compare himself to on the road to self-discovery.

In the case of *Siddhartha*, it is by the river where Siddhartha attempts suicide. The river in *Siddhartha* is the all-knowing figure who guides the protagonist through the later stages in life. Siddhartha stays by the river for many years and learns some of its secrets. "It seemed to him that whoever understood this river and its secrets, would understand much more, many secrets, all secrets." (*Siddhartha* 101-102) He learns that the pure and materialistic worlds must be harmonized. To *Siddhartha*, the end of the road is the state of Nirvana. This state is reached with the help of the river.

Hesse is careful not to reveal too many secrets from the all-knowing figures. They only provide hints, guiding the protagonists toward the proper path. Without the help of these beings, the protagonists would have taken much longer, and it would have been much more difficult to reach the final state of 'Nirvana', the end of the road to self-discovery. Perhaps they would not have reached that state at all. Max and the river also aid the protagonists in developing new interpretations of the world. The questioning of religion is a crisis that is eventually faced by every person. The biblical story of Abel and Cain are the roots for the changes of Sinclair in *Demian*. This story is interpreted differently by Max, causing confusion in Sinclair. The new interpretation states that the mark of Cain actually indicates a strong, courageous individual, as opposed to one who is branded as a murderer. "According to *Demian*, the story was not properly recorded or interpreted: Cain was neither the villain nor someone to pity; rather he was a man of courage and character." (Galbreath 176).

Though it requires time for Sinclair to realize that there are other interpretations of religion, he gradually begins to question the traditional interpretations. In grammar school, Sinclair is shown questioning all interpretation under the encouragement of Max when Sinclair says, "I could not and would not abandon Abel and glorify Cain now that I myself had once more become an Abel." (*Demian* 44) After deep thought and incubation, the traditional interpretations of religion are rejected. Following his confirmation ceremonies in grammar school he truly believes in Max's interpretation. Religion is modified when Sinclair discovers

Abraxas, a god that was both good and evil. Sinclair's conclusion is that the world as a whole consists of both the good and evil, and religion must to accept both.

In *Siddhartha*, the aspects of Buddhist religion are laced throughout the novel. The protagonist is obsessed with achieving the state of Nirvana. His first experience with the ascetics is in the hopes of achieving this state but he eventually questions whether he will ever reach it. Siddhartha says to his friend, Govinda, "He is sixty years old and has not attained Nirvana. He will be seventy and eighty years old, and you and I, we shall grow as old as he, and do exercises and fast and meditate. But we will not attain Nirvana, neither he nor we." (*Siddhartha* 18) Siddhartha's rejection of the methods of reaching self-discovery, is shown when he explains his belief to Gotama, the Illustrious One. "You have learned nothing through teachings, and so I think, O Illustrious One, that nobody finds salvation through teachings. That is why I am going on my way - not to seek another and better doctrine, for I know there is none, but to leave all doctrines and all teachers and to reach the goal [Nirvana] alone - or die." (*Siddhartha* 34). This also shows his modification of the Buddhist religion, his belief that Nirvana can only be achieved by one's own desire and actions, not through teachings. The questioning of fundamental beliefs and the development of such a situation shows the maturation of a character who is on the road to finding himself. These developments in personal beliefs are one of the obvious results of a quest of self-discovery.

The common theme of self-realization in *Demian* and *Siddhartha* is explored by providing firsthand experience for the protagonist. In each case, the protagonist is immersed in two different worlds, guided along by an all-knowing figure, and given the opportunity to re-evaluate religion. The most important result of the exploration of the two worlds is the realization that a combination of both worlds is necessary, finding a place in society. Guidance is provided by the all-knowing figure, accelerating the attainment of self-discovery. Religion is examined to allow the protagonist to develop his own personal philosophy. Hermann Hesse follows the philosophy of firsthand experience by employing these three elements. In each novel the protagonist reaches his destination of self-realization through similar paths. Though the road to self-realization is a long and painful journey that must be experienced.

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