

Bottleneck of Dreams *Siddhartha* Receptacle¹ Motif Paper

When material limitations are kept in mind, bigger is better. However, when the scope of the receptacle extends to the world of abstractions— the land of infinite containers of the mind and heart— there are no physical limits. There should be an unlimited capacity. But two friends, thinkers, wanderers, searchers from *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse feel the worldly limits on their goal of enlightenment— they do not understand how to attain Nirvana, to allow the container of themselves to be filled with a unity of *everything*, to achieve an *infinite* capacity of love for all things. When Siddhartha accomplishes his goal, he realizes that what limits the effective capacity of his unlimited mind is not the constraints of the physical world, but rather his own restricted mindset.

As a youth, Siddhartha best epitomizes an empty, closed receptacle, incapable of enlightenment. With the Brahmins, he is dissatisfied, his mind a “waiting vessel; and the vessel was not full” (5), even his fine education inadequate for his insatiable seeking. He is well-loved. He is well-taught. Yet he is “not satisfied [with his family and teachings], his soul [is] not at peace, his heart [is] not still” (5)— the containers of his soul and mind are not full, his ambitions unmet. He wishes to look past the meaningless prayers and teachings that he receives in order to control the Self. Although he has already set his goal, this initial goal misleads him and shuts closed his “waiting vessel.” He looks to avoid Samsara, avoid a life of useless teachings, avoid the Self— but since he believes that Nirvana is unattainable, at this early stage he seeks only to *avoid* Samsara. To *close* his mind to something. Instead of *opening* it to the concept of Nirvana.

With each step of his tumultuous path to enlightenment, Siddhartha learns to expose himself to new ideas— and, as a result, he allows his mind to expand exponentially. When he questions the meaning behind his spiritual practices— when he believes that “the source [of

¹ Receptacle: “an object or space used to contain something.” Synonyms: container, holder, repository (Google)

Atman] [is] within his own heart" (7), contained in the receptacle of the Self— he turns to the Samanas to attempt a new path of self-denial. Later, when he questions his path of self-denial, he finally notices that "amongst all the Samanas, probably not even one will attain Nirvana" (18). After looking to the Illustrious Buddha for advice, he realizes the teachings will not benefit him and turns to the idea of his own experiences. Over and over does Siddhartha modify his path, improve the receptacle of his mind to better receive and contain the vast experience he gains. Only after many years of disillusionment, Siddhartha examines his life and cleans off the grimy film closing off the entrance to the unsatisfied container of his mind, and he finally is able to beneficially contain the knowledge gained. He opens his judgment wide enough to comprehend the deed of suicide he is about to commit and realize the wrong in it. Only then can he totally listen to the river and learn from it in order to become enlightened.

Govinda seeks wisdom in a very similar way, always exhibiting "eagerness, loyalty, curiosity, anxiety" (91)— traits that *appear* to indicate open-mindedness and enlightenment. But even well into seniority, there is "still restlessness in his heart and his seeking was unsatisfied" (139), despite these traits. However, as Siddhartha points out to him in their conversation, it is in fact "as a result of [Govinda's] seeking, [he] cannot find" (140). In other words, Govinda is trying *too* much to simply fill the container of his mind with knowledge and experience in order to get himself to Nirvana. However, his intense focus on the task itself— instead on the *essence* and meaning— renders him unworthy and incapable of filling himself up with wisdom.

Siddhartha also sets off to contain the earthly desire of love. However, he has "remained a Samana" (73)— retained a hateful, closed attitude towards the world. Similarly, Kamala cannot love because she "practice[s] love as an art" (73)— an objective, insincere approach to love. Neither view is genuine, and they cannot contain love like an ordinary person. Openly.

Although people are incapable of containing much due to their inherent arrogance and biased views, the river contains the essence of *all* life— Siddhartha discovers that it is the ultimate receptacle of wisdom, the divine teacher that gives him and his fisherman mentor their enlightenment. It holds millions of tons of water and acts as an entity that is almost alive, with “a thousand eyes— green, white, crystal, sky blue” (101), a container of “much more, many secrets, all secrets” (102). Hesse uses the imagery of “eyes” and “secrets” to portray the likeness of the river to ordinary people— but the river contains much more than a human can perceive, is far superior to man. Unlike Siddhartha, who is an imperfect, mortal form, the river embodies the final form. A *perfect* form. It is a receptacle that simultaneously holds, modifies, accepts, flushes out. Without a conscious thought, without any discrimination of what it takes in or lets out, it is constantly evolving to listen and accept the world around itself.

Only then, at the stage that the river exists, is the opening spread wide. It is the *infinite receptacle* at this point. It contains all. Neither time nor space exists. It is all and always.

The river can act as Siddhartha’s teacher because of this amazing, indefinite capacity, unlike the insufficient knowledge of the Brahmins. It is capable of holding “them all, the whole, the unity ... [and] Om— perfection” (136). It is this, an impenetrable and inescapable container of everything and one, a black hole of ideas that makes the river the ultimate container. Although water and physical objects can flow freely through, everything that the river has ever encountered has become a part of it, encapsulated in its limitless spiritual repository.

Never will it suffice to restrict one’s attitude when all forms are transitory and the world is always changing. In a hypothetically infinite medium such as the mind, the only bottleneck to dreams and aspirations lies in one’s thinking. The ideal receptacle is one without thought, without Self, without conscious narrow-mindedness: it exists in a state of pure *flow*.