

# From Siddhartha to Buddha: A Study of Individuation as a Process of Self-Discovery

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to study the life journey of Siddhartha from a prince to the well-known Buddha, who discovered himself at the end of his journey, both physical and psychological. This paper further explores how Prince Siddhartha overcame his personal shadow and successfully achieved individuation by discovering his own self from within. This path of self-realization stands parallel to Carl Gustav Jung's idea of dismantling one's persona and connecting with the self. In Kavitaran Shrestha's *Light of the Himalayas*, Siddhartha's journey towards enlightenment is studied from psychoanalytical perspective. This aids in studying the protagonist's psychological journey in terms of archetypes of individuation. By using Jung's Individuation theory this paper focuses on how Siddhartha encountered his shadow and brought it to light thus by changing the unconscious to conscious. After attaining psychological wholeness, Siddhartha brings his shadow to light by becoming Buddha. His search for meaning runs parallel to the Jungian notion of Individuation.*

**Keywords:** Individuation, Archetypes, Shadow, Psychoanalysis.

This paper takes Kavitaran Shrestha's *Light of the Himalayas* for analysis and intends to study the life journey of Siddhartha from a prince to the well-known Buddha, who discovered himself at the end of his physical and psychological journey. Journey of life is common to all humans but the final result of discovering the highest version of one's self that brings out the shadow to light diminishes the thin line between human and God. As a result, a human himself becomes God and a teacher, guide, and leader who lead other humans towards the path of light. Prince Siddhartha Gautama who transformed into the Buddha is an apt example of the existence of divinity in a man and his character is thoroughly analyzed in this article based on Carl Jung's Individuation. In the novel, Siddhartha himself plays an indispensable role in his own spiritual awakening by facing his inner demons directly. He experiences both extremes of life to achieve the final psychological wholeness. Carl Jung's theories offer a unique and discerning framework for grasping the intricacies of mind. This article uses the central theme of Jungian psychology, Individuation, by applying it to the life story of Siddhartha who transformed from a Prince to a divine being. How Individuation is carried through in the life of Siddhartha is the central theme of this article.

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and psychologist who founded the school of analytical psychology. His theory of personality concentrates on the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious mind, universal archetypes, the process of individuation, and

psychological types. This theory emphasizes the integration of various aspects of personality to achieve self-realization and encompasses universal and individual dynamics.

Carl Jung defined the psyche as the entirety of human mind – both conscious and unconscious, encompassing thoughts, feelings, memories and instincts. It aids in self-discovery and balance, guiding personal growth and understanding. According to Carl Jung human psyche consists of the conscious ego, the personal unconscious (unique to each individual), and the collective unconscious (inherited universal human experiences). The personal unconscious is solely anchored in an individual's personal history. The contents of the collective unconscious are not limited to one person, but they are common to the human race in general. Jung's concept of archetypes is closely tied into his theory of the collective unconscious. He envisions an archetype as active patterns of instinctual behavior and views them as governing the life cycle of every human being. An archetype is not a particular thought or entity, but rather a structure of thought, or a pattern of perception. The archetypes of the psyche, according to Jung, consist of persona (the social role we present to the world), shadow (our repressed desires and weaknesses), anima/animus (The feminine aspects & the masculine aspects within the male psyche and the female psyche respectively), ego (The executive part of the personality, which is responsible for our sense of identity) and the self (The central archetype of the psyche, that serves as the ultimate goal of the individuation process).

According to Carl Jung, Individuation is a lifelong process of psychological development that assists an individual with self-realization and achieving psychological wholeness. It integrates unconscious aspects of the psyche, (shadow and archetypes) with conscious awareness to develop a unique, unified self, that differs from the collective one. This process fosters self-knowledge, purpose, and a deeper sense of individuality and well-being. It consists of becoming an 'individual', an indivisible being that is unique and distinct. It operates in two chronologically determined stages. First it refers to ego development which is related to one's personal identity. It does not stop at ego development. Rather it goes beyond the archetypal existence, which is possible only if the unconscious contents are identified, acknowledged and integrated into the psyche. This leads to the realization of the inherent self, which represents the center of the total personality that lies beyond the curbs of the ego. The complete self-realization is the goal of the individuation process which is a gradual one. Individuation is seeking the self from within, and understanding who one is. It can also be termed as Self-realization.

The path of attaining individuation requires the identification of persona in the first place. The persona is influenced by the external world. Persona is a cultural mask which one tries to wear for the outer world. When one does that the true individual 'self' is kept dormant to the point of being unknown. One needs to break away from the clutches of societal norms and cultural values if one needs to embrace the path to Individuation. This is what happened to Siddhartha when he was a toddler in Kavitaran Shrestha's *Light of the Himalayas*. In the novel, when he was taken for his first holy visit to a Goddess it was all new and unintelligible for him. He was curious to know why the flowers blossom, mature, wither and fall, why customs are followed without questions, why people visit temples with garlands and why the scriptures are blindly followed. But to his questions no one gave answers. It's like there was no end to Siddhartha's curiosity and none had the capacity to quench the child's inquisitive mind.

As Siddhartha grew, he spoke little and loved solitude. He didn't like fights and noise and spent much of his time alone. If he wanted to listen he only listened to the intellectual arguments. Even when he listened innumerable questions sprang from his mind for which no one has the answer. He became quite fed-up with his family's worthless rituals. Once when Siddhartha was eight years old, he was taken for a celebration attended by many people. For Siddhartha, it was crowd and commotion instead of enjoyment. He began pulling himself away from the crowd and sat under a tree doing meditation. From that spot he saw a thick flight of birds hovering above the ploughed field.

At first, he thought that the birds were enjoying the celebration but later on he notices that the birds are feeding on the worms from the earth. This went on until the bird feeding on the worms, was ruthlessly hunted

by a hawk in midair. The bird which was devouring things, a while ago, became food to another in a short time. After witnessing this Siddhartha's mind turned utterly restless. Questions began pestering his mind and to get answers he sat in deep meditation. He felt like a cotton ball, devoid of any pain or suffering. It is a fully conscious state where all his senses awakened. He attained a state of nothingness and weightlessness. In that state he started thinking about the birds and worms and discovered an ultimate truth: Organisms kill and ought to kill others for safeguarding their lives and it is the root of all sorrows.

One cannot live without eating the other,  
What a big paradox this is, in the world!  
Does living mean being able to kill someone else  
Don't those who cannot kill have any life? (LOTH, 120).

Siddhartha began meditation from a tender age to get away from the noisy fiestas of the society. This clearly shows how he begins facing his shadow and how his persona is different from the rest of the children.

At the age of fifteen he grasped all the scriptures, and studied under different Gurus to acquire more knowledge. At that moment, his mind was more and more attracted towards studying philosophies. He never argued with anyone because he thought arguments are violent. He remained engrossed in contemplation and meditation and tried to search for answers and resolutions within himself so as not to hurt anyone with his words or actions. He listened a lot without disparities, heard from others and absorbed everything like a sponge. He abhorred hunting and even saved a crane wounded by one of his friends. Whatever he did, wherever he went, the questions in his mind never got answers. Even though he studied the doctrines of Mahaveera and Lord Krishna's *Bhagawata Geetha*, he never found answers.

Even when Siddhartha got married solely for his ageing parents, he never had any interest in marriage. He felt that he and his wife were co-actors in the drama called life and are required to play their roles as man and wife and pave a way for begetting kids. He was utterly shocked to see an incident where a man falling prey to his own desires. At the age of twenty one, Siddhartha was like elastic especially in his family life. He will stretch far when he was pulled but returned to his original shape when released. He responded well to Yasodhara's love drives and completely got detached from all his scholarship, philosophical thoughts and asceticism when he was with her. But deep down in his heart he still was aloof. Even when he knew about Yasodhara's pregnancy, he felt like he was standing alone amidst the celebrating crowd. He felt like he was being handcuffed and his freedom being shackled.

He inferred love was an illusion after going through with it. He thought of it as a web of illusions that limited man to the boundaries of birth, eating, living and begetting children. He was deeply distracted and alarmed by these thoughts. He was completely lost like a traveller who has lost his way in the desert. He was deeply shaken from within and was lost in himself. His carefully constructed veil of illusion could not indefinitely protect Siddhartha from the fundamental truths of human existence. The sheltered prince began to grapple with existential questions. He wanted to explore and have a look of the society around. He pondered over the inevitable decline that accompanies aging, the fragility of life in the face of illness, and the inescapable reality of death.

The turning point in Siddhartha's life came when he saw the realities of life known as the "Four Passing Sights." This series of pivotal encounters outside the palace walls, with his charioteer Chandakka, shattered Siddhartha's sheltered existence and brought him face-to-face with the stark realities of human suffering. His first encounter was when he witnessed an extremely old man walking with the help of a stick, with white hair and wrinkled face. Seeing him Siddhartha realized that one day, he himself, his, wife, father, mother and everyone else will become like this and will pass their miserable days 'in hope for living, carrying death within.' (LOTH 226) He saw the inevitability of aging and physical decline for the first time. His second encounter was a sick man crying and writhing in pain He was shuddered by the ghastly reality and thought 'if the body was home to much dreadful sickness like this, which obsessions drive people towards so much of pleasure and luxury?' (LOTH 229) The sight of the sick man starkly illustrated the vulnerability of human bodies to disease and pain.

His third encounter was when he saw a dead young man who had become a mere memory of this world. This scene moved him to the core all his senses became barren. He stood gawking at the last right preparations done for the man. He thought if man knows death is inevitable someday 'why do people perpetrate anger, justice, hatred, atrocities and violence upon others to extend their love for life?' (LOTH 231) The corpse forced him to acknowledge the impermanence of life and the inescapable fact of death. He was greatly troubled by the absurdities of human life. This is when he saw a passing monk with an austere, placid and contented face. This fourth sight offered a glimmer of hope to him. In the ascetic's serene demeanor, Siddhartha glimpsed the possibility of finding inner tranquility and freedom amidst the world's sufferings. He was terribly bothered by the absurdity of human life and laughed at the ignorance of the human race which gave importance to luxuries and pleasure.

Siddhartha felt detached from everything when his child was born. He saw the child as an impediment that came into his life to thwart his path to renunciation. He grew immensely restless. He realized that the problems of men lie in their own miseries. He wanted to unshackle himself from all the social bondages and get untangled from his own desires. Driven by this newfound awareness, he made a life-altering decision. After getting the tearful consents of Yashodara, his friends and his aged parents, he renounced his princely life, his palace comforts, and his loving family, and embarked on his life altering quest of discovering himself, at the age of twenty nine.

His family and friends tried to divert Siddhartha by tempting him with alcohol, meat, fish gestures and women, but he remained headstrong in his decision to become a recluse. Even though Siddhartha decided to renounce, when the time came to leave the palace; he mentally struggled and become depressed, but then decided to keep up his words to safeguard the dignity of his parents and clan. He left the palace on a full moon night with his horse Kanthaka and his beloved servant Chhandaka who was there with him when he witnessed the Four Passing Sights. He went to Guru Bharadwaja's cottage from whom he learned the skill of meditation and received the renunciation ritual from him. There he cleaned himself in the river, shaved his head, handed over his robes, sword and horse to Chhandaka and received a saffron robe and alms bowl which indicated that he has become a recluse.

The Guru said that Siddhartha is henceforth free of all the worldly attachments; He no longer has any family or relation; He has no property, no country and no king; He doesn't have any ambition of his own, nor does he have any former name, form or robe. Henceforth, he will be called by the name Gautama, or Bhikshu Gautama. At the beginning of his journey towards enlightenment, he passed through many villages, saw many people and met many sages. He received his first food through alms and stayed on porches to spend the nights. He felt everything was strange and he entered a new world. Eventhough he has broken every shackle that came his way, they are all only external changes. He began to transform from within after receiving his first food post renunciation. He gained experiences from and learnt new things from whatever he saw and imbibed everything.

Once he came across river Ganga, got amazed at her clear water, pristine looks and her big size. There he met a boatman who carried him to the other bank. At that time he realised how water is very important and how everything will become dry and lifeless without it. He felt close to the boatman and left the place after assuring him that he will return one day. He visited many sages and learned many things including different kinds of meditations, but still felt incomplete. He learned that Yoga is a practice that allows the culturing of the depth of the soul. It helps man, who is an animal, to stay above all beasts because of his faculty of thinking. Here Siddhartha wants to attain higher state of learning by freeing himself from the 'vestiges of the attachments, prejudices of the past, and ambitions for future' (LOTH, 313). Gautama realised that he can never get answers to his questions on life and death through meditative practices. Gautama also embarked on a rigorous path of self-denial and asceticism and wandered as a mendicant, looking filthy, unclean and looked like a crazy man. Gautama became quite frail physically and mentally and fainted. After waking up he realized that self-mortification is not the key to liberation. So he shunned the path of self-mutilation and became strong again. He became a Guru to himself learning newer things from success and failure.

After some time he became strong and healthy, both by body and mind. On his way to Gaya, on a full moon day, he was feeling so excited. He found a colossal banyan tree and slipped into meditation under it. The villagers who saw him saw a type of halo emanating from the countenance of Gautama. He was feeling restless and thought he is closer to attaining his goal. So he plunged into river Neranjana, took a bath and declared that this excitement will push him towards enlightenment. He left that place and reached Gaya in the evening. There he sat down under a huge banyan tree. Once Gautama settled down his mind began to wander. He thought about his wife, his new born son, his old mother, his family, friends, society and all the others he had left behind. He regretted leaving them behind just to save his honor. Once these thoughts popped up in his mind, he realized his Maras (his own lust) started to engulf him in various forms and persons. But he considered them as vicious trivialities, vanquished them all with his intellectual power and rinsed everything that entered his mind with the light of his knowledge, the knowledge he gained all through these years. The maras transformed into values and his mind became free from the illusion of worldly superficialities. The all had been cleaned and made pure. He conquered all the Maras which tempted him these eight long years.

The first army of Maras comprised of amorous drives, second of non-attachment, third of hunger and thirst, fourth of desires, fifth of sluggishness, sixth of phobias, seventh of doubts, eighth of vanity, ninth of greed for profit, tenth of vanity of fame. (LOTH, 351)

After the maras left him, Siddhartha started ascending into meditation. Gautama's mind became completely serene and pure without any prejudices. His mind and body became one and flowed together. He experienced the living and non-living, the universe and time within himself. He clearly understood the mysteries of birth, death, happiness, sorrow and other questions about creation. He realized the root cause of all things is ignorance and it can be eliminated by realizing the truth. Intellectual enlightenment takes an individual to the path of liberation. This golden path of life consists only of pure knowledge, pure thoughts, pure speech, pure conduct, pure behavior, pure attempts, true awakening and a true mind, all centralized into one. In his final state of enlightenment, Gautama experienced such lasting peace. He broke open the wall of ignorance and uttered,

Right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Total eight! In other words 'Astangika Marga' – the eight-fold path (LOTH 354)

He moved from darkness to light and left with only pure thoughts that lead to enlightenment. Now he was left with only four noble, divine truths in his mind which are called as 'four ultimate truths'.

*There is suffering*

*Suffering has a cause*

*Sufferings can be eliminated*

*There are ways of elimination for the suffering* (LOTH 354)

On the third quarter of that full moon night Buddha liberated from the world of sorrow. After a long night of meditation and inner struggle, Gautama finally achieved awakening. He became the Buddha, the "Awakened One," and embarked on a new mission – to share his insights and guide others on the path to liberation. After his enlightenment he told the villagers that he attained 'bodhi' and all his searches have ended. Then Gautama rose from his seat and bowed down to his self that had attained enlightenment, then to the tree under which he meditated and called it as the 'Bodhi tree' (the tree of knowledge) and named the place as 'Bodha Gaya' (the site of enlightenment).

Siddhartha's decision to leave his sheltered life and embrace a journey of self-exploration stems from a deep compassion for humanity and a yearning to understand the root causes of suffering. His journey serves as a powerful testament to the human spirit's capacity for self-discovery and the relentless pursuit of truth. Siddhartha's sheltered upbringing and sudden exposure to human suffering can be considered as a great shock and disruption to his reality. He encounters his shadow and attempts to achieve a state of purity and enlightenment without affecting others.

Siddhartha's journey can be seen as a pursuit of individuation where he becomes distinctive and different. His transformation from an ordinary human Siddhartha to an enlightened, divine Buddha is an example of Individuation where he achieves a unique and distinct identity. His austerities and meditation practices can be viewed as attempts to confront his shadow and integrate it into his conscious awareness. Siddhartha's awakening under the Bodhi tree can be interpreted as his encounter with the self, the archetype representing the unified wholeness of the psyche. This enlightenment signifies the integration of his conscious and unconscious mind, the culmination of his individuation process.

Siddhartha's teachings can be seen as an articulation of these universal truths. The Buddha's teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, can be understood as guidelines for navigating the process of individuation. They emphasize the importance of recognizing the causes of suffering (often rooted in unconscious desires and attachments), cultivating mental clarity and ethical conduct, and ultimately transcending the egoic self to realize one's interconnectedness with all beings. By sharing his insights and guiding others on the path to liberation, he aims to help others achieve enlightenment and integrate their own shadows. His journey is a process of individuation, where he confronted his shadow, integrated it into his consciousness, and ultimately attained enlightenment. By offering valuable guidance to others, he guides them through their own paths to attain psychological wholeness. Buddha's act of renunciation was a rejection not only of luxury but also of societal dogmas, expectations and attachments. He sought to create his own values, though informed by very different worldviews. His quest for release from suffering can be seen as an avoidance of life's essential struggle. However, in the end, he proves that the true strength lies in recognizing the impermanent nature of desire and overcoming the attachments that lead to suffering. Buddha's path might be interpreted as a quest for self-mastery and transcendence. He challenged conventional morality and sought to live according to self-created values. Yet, his fundamental divergence lies in his understanding of suffering.

In the soul-searching journey of Siddhartha, it is evident right from the beginning that he seems much concerned about his social identity or phenomenal self. He undergoes psychological trauma living with the identity imposed upon him from the outside, and this precisely prompts him to leave his household and say farewell to his former identity. He firmly believes that such culturally established ways of life are incapable of affecting enlightenment. In Jungian psychology, this is equivalent to sloughing off a persona to drift towards connecting with the self. He begins to have an awakening in the form of inner dissatisfaction: endowed with a questioning mindset and to seek cosmic wisdom, Siddhartha takes his leave and succeeds in attaining psychological wholeness not only for himself but for the whole world. Jung speaks of the process of individuation as a kind of rebirth and regards it a natural transformation. In order to attain transformation an individual needs to come to terms with his 'other being' which is nothing but the greater personality in ourselves. Siddhartha does succeed in this transition, as evidenced in his journey from Siddhartha to the Buddha and merges himself with the eternal or the no-self. His journey towards enlightenment serve as stepping-stones to self realization and from a psychoanalytical perspective, it can be seen as the process of attaining individuation.

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