As you read the passage, pay attention to the way that this story reveals aspects of Buddhism. The following terms may be new to you: presentiment, Samsara, Krishna, Agni, and transitory. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

“Siddhartha,” he [Govinda] said, “we are now old men. We may never see each other again in this life. I can see, my dear friend, that you have found peace. I realize that I have not found it. Tell me one more word, my esteemed friend, tell me something that I can conceive, something I can understand! Give me something to help me on my way, Siddhartha. My path is often hard and dark.”

Siddhartha was silent and looked at him with his calm, peaceful smile. Govinda looked steadily in his face, with anxiety, with longing. Suffering, continual seeking and continual failure were written in his look.

Siddhartha saw it and smiled.

“Bend near to me!” he whispered in Govinda’s ear. “Come, still nearer, quite close! Kiss me on the forehead, Govinda.”

Although surprised, Govinda was compelled by a great love and presentiment to obey him; he leaned close to him and touched his forehead with his lips. As he did this, something wonderful happened to him. While he was still dwelling in Siddhartha’s strange words, while he strove in vain to dispel the conception of time, to imagine Nirvana and Samsara as one, while even a certain contempt for his friend’s words conflicted with a tremendous love and esteem for him, this happened to him.
He no longer saw the face of his friend Siddhartha. Instead he saw other faces, a long series, a continuous stream of faces—hundreds, thousands, which all came and disappeared and yet all seemed to be there at the same time, which all continually changed and renewed themselves and which were yet all Siddhartha. He saw the face of a fish, of a carp, with tremendous painfully opened mouth, a dying fish with dimmed eyes. He saw the face of a newly born child, red and full of wrinkles, ready to cry. . . He saw the heads of animals—boars, crocodiles, elephants, oxen, birds. He saw Krishna and Agni. He saw all these forms and faces in a thousand relationships to each other, all helping each other, loving, hating, and destroying each other and become newly born. Each one was mortal, a passionate, painful example of all that is transitory. Yet none of them died, they only changed, were always reborn, continually had a new face: only time stood between one face and another. And all these forms and faces rested, flowed, reproduced, swam past and merged into each other, and over them all there was continually something thin, unreal and yet existing, stretched across like thin glass or ice, like a transparent skin, shell, form or mask of water—and this mask was Siddhartha’s smiling face which Govinda touched with his lips at that moment.

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ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Comprehension: Recall  What does Govinda ask Siddharta?

2. Critical Thinking: Interpret  What does Siddhartha share with Govinda?

ACTIVITY

On a separate piece of paper, make a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts Buddhism with Hinduism. Use print or online resources and your textbook for information about the two religions.