

Guide to Enjoying Salinger's  
*The Catcher in the Rye,*  
*Franny and Zooey,*  
and  
*Raise High the Roof Beam,*  
*Carpenters*



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John P. Anderson



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*Guide to Enjoying Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye, Franny and Zooey,  
and Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*

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For Dominique Jennings,  
the man who has always known who he is.

To Amy Hungerford,  
whose YouTube broadcast Yale lecture inspired this effort.





From the *Chandogya Upanishad*, believed to have been written *circa* 8th to 6th century BCE:

It is below, it is above; it is to the west, it is to the east, it is to the south, it is to the north: it is, in fact, this entire world...

And truly, the one who sees this, thinks this and understands this, takes pleasure in the Self, is joined to the Self, knows bliss in the Self: such a one is autonomous. He has unlimited freedom in all worlds.

But those who think otherwise than this are ruled by others, inhabit perishable worlds, and in all worlds are unfree.

From Joseph Campbell, *Myths of Light*:

But what struck me immediately was that the whole point of Oriental wisdom and mythic themes is that you are not in exile—that the god is within you. You can't be exiled from it. All that can happen is that you can fail to know it, that you don't realize it, that you haven't found a way to open your consciousness to this presence that is right within you.

“I am in this world but not of it.”

—J.D. Salinger



# Table of Contents

How to Use this Book.....	15
Big Picture.....	17
<b><i>The Catcher in the Rye:</i></b>	
<b>The Hindu Connection.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Section I: Introduction.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Hindu Connection.....	19
New Testament.....	20
Rehab.....	20
Hinduism.....	21
Literary Brahman.....	27
Behold the Change in Holden.....	30
Dickens.....	41
Connection and Separation.....	43
Adolescence Identity.....	45
Identity and Consciousness.....	48
Holden's Identity: The Second Birth.....	48
Anamnesis.....	50
Caste and Karma: Caste in Ice.....	52
Kundalini.....	54
Jesus on Knowing Yourself.....	63
The Catcher in the Rye and the Swine in the Field.....	64
Sexual Attraction as First Base to <i>Brahman</i> .....	69
The Early Bra Opening.....	70
Identity and Attitude.....	71
Hunting Hat and Hunting Cultures.....	72
Holden's and Hamlet's Hat.....	74
Three Days in NYC: Christ in Hell.....	77
Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.....	78
Meaning of the Narrator and Merry-Go-Round Plot.....	81
More of Salinger's Techniques.....	82
Plot Vectors in the Story.....	84

*Guide to Enjoying Three of Salinger's Works*

Chiasm..... 85  
Oneness and Detachment ..... 86  
Proper Art and the Reader ..... 88  
Salinger's Formula..... 89

**Section II: Text..... 91**

1. Saturday Afternoon on Independence Hill..... 91  
2. Saturday Afternoon at Old Spencer's House ..... 99  
3. Saturday Afternoon at the Pencey Dorm, Half Time  
at the Game..... 104  
4. Saturday Afternoon in the Head with Stradlater..... 107  
5. Saturday Evening and the Mitt Composition ..... 111  
6. Saturday Evening and Publication Rejection..... 113  
7. Late Saturday evening in the Pre-Monastery ..... 114  
8. Hitting on Mrs. Morrow on the Saturday Night Train . 117  
9. Early Sunday AM in the City of Brotherly Disregard ... 120  
10. Dancing with the Stars Early Sunday AM ..... 122  
11. Early Sunday AM Memories of Jane ..... 124  
12. Early Sunday AM in Horwitz's Cab..... 126  
13. Early Sunday AM with Sunny..... 127  
14. Early Sunday AM after Sunny ..... 129  
15. Sunday Morning with the Nuns and Sally..... 130  
16. Late Sunday Morning at the Glass Cases..... 132  
17. Sunday Afternoon with the Lunts..... 134  
18. Sunday Evening in the Closet..... 135  
19. Sunday Evening in the Closet Part II ..... 137  
20. Early Monday AM and Lost in the Water Closet ..... 139  
21. Early Monday AM with Phoebe Part I..... 141  
22. Early Monday AM with Phoebe Part II ..... 143  
23. Early Monday AM with Phoebe Part III ..... 144  
24. Early Monday AM at Antolini's ..... 145  
25. Monday Morning and a New Beginning..... 150  
26. Some Months Later..... 155

***Franny and Zooey: Take Out Zen* ..... 157**

**Section IFZ: Introduction ..... 157**

Protocol..... 157  
 Franny and Zooey..... 157  
 Take Out Zen..... 158  
 Emptying Out..... 164  
 Purity..... 168  
 Sex..... 169  
 Yama and Yami: Bessie's Dualism ..... 171  
 Jesus and Zen ..... 172  
 Art ..... 173  
 Narrator..... 174

**Section IIFZ: *Franny*..... 175**

Franny's Problem..... 175  
 Train Station ..... 175  
 Franny's Lane ..... 179  
 The Pilgrim ..... 182

**Section IIIFZ: *Zooey*..... 187**

Opening: The Narrator as Soul of the Story..... 187  
 The Back Ground and Tub Text..... 191  
 The Letter..... 193  
 Bessie Buts In..... 200  
 Franny on the Sofa ..... 206  
 Satori..... 214

***Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters:***

**Kabbalah Reception..... 219**

**Section IRH: Introduction ..... 219**

Reception ..... 219

Characters..... 222

Kabbalah Generally ..... 224

Kabbalah and Reception..... 225

TZTZ God and ES God ..... 227

Sefirot and Salinger's Characters ..... 227

TZTZ in Roof Beam – Excrement..... 229

Clear Havana Cigar..... 230

Enclosed Space..... 230

WWII..... 230

Narrator's Voice..... 231

**Section IIRH: Text..... 233**

**Appendix One..... 255**

**Post Script..... 257**

Through the Peep Hole ..... 257

*Bananafish*..... 257

*The Laughing Man*..... 269

*Seymour; An Introduction* ..... 275

*Hapworth*..... 277

**Conclusion..... 281**

**Sources..... 283**

## How to Use This Book

This book is organized on the assumption that before you read or reread *Catcher*, you will read the Introduction in Section I and then before you proceed to read each episode of *Catcher*, you will first read the comments on that individual episode in Section II.

With *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High*, I suggest that you read the entire analysis for each and then read the individual work.

And most importantly, make yourself open and receptive to the power of Salinger's art. His method reaches into the Big Unknown. Marvel how he probes the relationship between the human experience and the Ultimate Powers That Be. For that big reach, Salinger used a customized version of venerable Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and Jewish Kabbalah.





## Big Picture

The Hindu connection structures what happens to Holden in *Catcher*, and Zen structures what happens to Franny in *Franny and Zooey*. Principal tenants of Kabbalah influence and structure important aspects of the story *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters*.

These choices were no doubt influenced by Salinger's experiments with different forms of spirituality. *Catcher* was published in 1951, *Franny* in 1955, *Raise High* in 1955 and *Zooey* in 1957.

These stories have important connections to each other and like the Glass family live most audaciously when together.



# *The Catcher in the Rye:* The Hindu Connection

## Section I: Introduction

### Hindu Connection

*Catcher* reincarnates eternal issues that Salinger found addressed in Hinduism, particularly because of its main emphasis on separation and connection.

Salinger focuses this story on the effect of separation or connection in two critical human relationships, the relationship between a person as he or she presents to the world and his or her own internal genuine identity [self to self] and the relationship between that person and others [self to others].

Salinger used these issues to construct the living and breathing life experiences of the memorable teenage character Holden Caulfield. Holden's troubled experiences with himself and his self with others supply the flesh for the story. Venerable Hindu principles provide the connecting skeleton.

The Hindu skeleton joins these two relationships not just to connection but to interdependence: that only to the extent a self is genuine can that self rise to love others unconditionally. On the other hand, a self who remains separated from his or her true identity will remain largely separated from others.

This Hindu connection shapes the main content or idea in the story. At first Holden is divorced from his true self and then finds himself and in the process finds others, at least certain others. While in separation, he does not know who he is. In rehab he finds himself by writing and moves personally from separation to connection.

Salinger shaped this change in Holden from separation to connection to follow the lines of the principal Hindu idea about human experience: that finding your personal *Atman*, your genuine self or consciousness, is the ticket to the big connection, the basic unity of all beings, the universal *Brahman*. To show the

way, Salinger lights the story with several Hindu symbols and concepts: reincarnation, *kundalini*, *maya*, yoga, Dancing *Shiva* and other symbols of release.

## **New Testament**

The New Testament of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Catcher* etched a lesson in the minds of millions of young readers around the globe. That lesson teaches you to be true to your genuine self, not to a self fashioned for others and separated from your genuine self. Don't be a "phony." As Oscar Wilde put the issue earlier, "Be yourself, everyone else is taken."

Holden initially identifies himself only by way of what he is not and what he does not like, instead of what he is and what he likes. He knows separation but not connection, his non-self but not his self. This restricts his connections; it is hard to connect from and with a non-self. Imagine a Jesus who preached solely on the negative basis that he was not traditionally Jewish rather than the positive basis of independence and unconditional love.

Most younger readers searching for their own self relate to Holden's alienated and negative acting out and self-imposed separation from others. These readers also mainline his adrenaline soaked language, adrenaline being the early drug of choice. But Salinger shows that negativity is no base for self or relations with others. A successful life can be built on detachment but not on negativity.

But given their sabbatical from serious spiritual issues, many younger readers miss the lesson of the change in Holden's relationship with other people. That is too bad because Holden's change is the main point of the book. The Fat Lady sings only in the last episode of the story.

## **Rehab**

Separation rules Holden's experiences in this story during his time at school and his "walkabout" in impersonal and separa-

tion-iced NYC. It rules for 25 episodes until the very last episode, the two page 26<sup>th</sup> episode. Finally, after 25 episodes of separation, connection rules Holden's attitude as he finally shines forth from rehab in Southern California, where he was treated to mend rather than to bend and blend. Unlike at school and in NYC, his uniquely personal soul was respected in the rehab treatment he received. He wasn't expelled because he was different.

In supportive rehab Holden finds himself by writing this story. We don't know whether he was encouraged to do so by his brother or by the rehab staff or he just did it all by himself. There were certainly earlier experiences in his life which pointed to a writing "career."

Acting in positive accord with his genuine identity as a writer, who he is instead of in opposition to who he is not, produces a fundamental change in Holden. The change is from troubled in himself and conditionally separated from others to detached in himself and unconditionally connected to others. His rehabbed pure self can love unconditionally and love even those who have done him harm.

As a result of writing the story, Holden warms up to an unconditionally positive connection to everyone he has written about, not everybody he has met but all his characters, all those he has written about. He creates and connects. With that the Hindu skeleton dances out of the closet with a dance card full of connections.

Do you need a rehab? Whom would you connect with?

## **Hinduism**

Hinduism provides the structure for the change in Holden, which is the point of the story. Salinger personally expressed confidence in Hinduism, particularly Vedanta Hinduism, as an important part of his own personal guide to the unknown. While he experimented with many spiritual systems, he seemed to come back to Vedanta. So first some theoretical doctrine since it is ingrained in the story.

The following are edited materials from Wikipedia to get you generally into the subject of Hinduism, how your individual *Atman* connects with the universal *Brahman*:

In Hinduism, **Brahman** (/ˈbrɑːmən/; ब्रह्मन्) connotes the highest Universal Principle, the Ultimate Reality in the universe.<sup>[1][2]</sup> In major schools of Hindu philosophy it is the material, efficient, formal and final cause of all that exists.<sup>[2][3][4]</sup> It is the pervasive, genderless, infinite, eternal truth and bliss which does not change, yet is the cause of all changes.<sup>[1][5]</sup> Brahman as a metaphysical concept is the single binding unity behind the diversity in all that exists in the universe.<sup>[1]</sup>

Think the unity binding all the different identities. All the different “I’s” joined in an authentic “we.” Being joined brings compassion. Ask yourself if quarks feel compassion at the sub-atomic level.

Creation is at the heart of *Brahman*:

Brahman is a Vedic Sanskrit word, and is conceptualized in Hinduism, states Paul Deussen, as the “creative principle which lies realized in the whole world”.<sup>[6]</sup> Brahman is a key concept found in Vedas, and extensively discussed in the early Upanishads.<sup>[7]</sup> The Vedas conceptualize Brahman as the Cosmic Principle.<sup>[8]</sup> In the Upanishads, it has been variously described as *Sat-cit-ānanda* (being-consciousness-bliss)<sup>[9][10]</sup> and as the highest reality.<sup>[11][note 1][note 2]</sup>

Brahman is discussed in Hindu texts with the concept of Atman (Soul, Self),<sup>[7]</sup> personal,<sup>[note 3]</sup> impersonal<sup>[note 4]</sup> or Para Brahman,<sup>[note 5]</sup> or in various combinations of these qualities depending on the philosophical school.<sup>[14]</sup> \*\*\* In non-dual schools of Hinduism such as the monist Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is identical to the Atman, Brahman is everywhere and inside each living being, and

there is connected spiritual oneness in all existence.<sup>[5][17][18]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta is what Salinger uses in this story. Creation was, of course, the first thing [at least reported] many First Movers like Yahweh did. After that, punishment seemed to be His interest.

Swan (Hansa, हंस) is the symbol for Brahman-Atman in Hindu iconography.<sup>[33][34]</sup>

Watch for the ducks in Central Park. Like the swan, they can lift off.

According to Radhakrishnan, the sages of the Upanishads teach Brahman as the ultimate essence of material phenomena that cannot be seen or heard, but whose nature can be known through the development of self-knowledge (*atma jnana*).<sup>[46]</sup>

Know yourself, know the ultimate.

### **Brahman as a metaphysical concept**[edit]

\*\*\*

In addition to the concept of Brahman, Hindu metaphysics includes the concept of Atman – or soul, self – which is also considered ultimately real.<sup>[61]</sup> \*\*\* In schools that equate Brahman with Atman, Brahman is the sole, ultimate reality.<sup>[67]</sup> The predominant teaching in the Upanishads is the spiritual identity of soul within each human being, with the soul of every other human being and living being, as well as with the supreme, ultimate reality *Brahman*.<sup>[68][69]</sup>

In the metaphysics of the major schools of Hinduism, Maya is perceived reality, one that does not reveal the hidden principles, the true reality – the Brahman. Maya is unconscious, Brahman-Atman is conscious. Maya is the literal and the effect, Brahman is the figurative

*Upādāna* – the principle and the cause.<sup>[61]</sup> Maya is born, changes, evolves, dies with time, from circumstances, due to invisible principles of nature. Atman-Brahman is eternal, unchanging, invisible principle, unaffected absolute and resplendent consciousness. Maya concept, states Archibald Gough, is “the indifferent aggregate of all the possibilities of emanatory or derived existences, pre-existing with Brahman”, just like the possibility of a future tree pre-exists in the seed of the tree.<sup>[61]</sup>

If *Brahman* is the figurative, then creative literature and art in general would be its rituals. *Maya* is the flesh of this story, the literal and the effect, and *Brahman* the skeleton, the principle and the cause.

Holden finally achieves harmony by writing this story while *Brahman* stands aside watching with approval as embodiment of the universal inner harmony:

\*\*\*

### **Brahman as an axiological concept[edit]**

Brahman and Atman are key concepts to Hindu theories of axiology: ethics and aesthetics.<sup>[83][84]</sup> *Ananda* (bliss), state Michael Myers and other scholars, has axiological importance to the concept of Brahman, as the universal inner harmony.<sup>[85][86]</sup> Some scholars equate Brahman with the highest value, in an axiological sense.<sup>[87]</sup>

The axiological concepts of Brahman and Atman is central to Hindu theory of values.<sup>[88]</sup> A statement such as **‘I am Brahman’, states Shaw, means ‘I am related to everything,’ and this is the underlying premise for compassion for others in Hinduism, for each individual’s welfare, peace, or happiness depends on others, including other beings and nature at large, and vice versa.**<sup>[89]</sup> Tietge states that even in non-dual schools of Hinduism where Brahman and Atman are treated ontologically equivalent, the theory of values emphasize individual agent and ethics. In these schools of



Hinduism, states Tietge, the theory of action are [sic] derived from and centered in compassion for the other, and not egotistical concern for the self.<sup>[90]</sup>

The axiological theory of values emerges implicitly from the concepts of Brahman and Atman, states Bauer.<sup>[91]</sup>

**The aesthetics of human experience and ethics are one consequence of self-knowledge in Hinduism, one resulting from the perfect, timeless unification of one's soul with the Brahman, the soul of everyone, everything and all eternity, wherein the pinnacle of human experience is not dependent on an afterlife, but pure consciousness in the present life itself.**<sup>[91]</sup> [emphasis added]

Inner harmony in beauty and truth, aesthetics and ethics. As the story unfolds at school, Holden is composed only when reading or writing. On his walkabout, only when creating in his imagination.

It does not assume that an individual is weak nor does it presume that he is inherently evil, but the opposite: human soul and its nature is held as fundamentally unqualified, faultless, beautiful, blissful, ethical, compassionate and good.<sup>[91][92]</sup> Ignorance is to assume it evil, liberation is to know its eternal, expansive, pristine, happy and good nature.<sup>[91]</sup> The axiological premises in the Hindu thought and Indian philosophies in general, states Nikam, is to elevate the individual, exalting the innate potential of man, where the reality of his being is the objective reality of the universe.<sup>[93]</sup> The Upanishads of Hinduism, summarizes Nikam, hold that the individual has the same essence and reality as the objective universe, and this essence is the finest essence; the individual soul is the universal soul, and Atman is the same reality and the same aesthetics as the Brahman.<sup>[93]</sup>

**Swan** (Hansa, हंस) is the symbol for Brahman-Atman in Hindu iconography.<sup>[2][3]</sup>