

Reader's Guide to
Madam, Have You Ever Really Been Happy?

By Meg Noble Peterson

Discussion points:

1. Name three things the author was searching for when she embarked on her world trip. In the end, did she find what she was searching for? If so, in what way?
2. How did she prepare for such an extensive journey?
3. What is the underlying force that drives the narrative? Did you feel that you were traveling with her and were not just an observer?
4. Which scenes most exemplify the author's search for independence and fulfillment?
5. Did the book title, *Madam, Have You Ever Really Been Happy?* speak to you, and on what level? How do you interpret the title?
6. In which incidents did you find humor?
7. Does this travel memoir remind you of classic adventures taken before computers and instant communication? If so, which ones and why?
8. Can you relate to the author's acceptance of hardship as a means of digging deeply into each new culture? Do you agree with her philosophy and mode of travel and her determination to simplify her life? Can you pinpoint events in the book where you felt she was putting herself in a risky situation?
9. Which adventures held your interest and why?
10. Did you relate to the author's anguish over her divorce and the events that led up to the dissolution of her marriage? What issues did it raise for you? How did she deal with her feelings of failure and despair?
11. Can you recall incidents in the book where her thoughts drifted back to her divorce and troubled marriage? How did she bring this into her story and how did it influence her relationship to the men she met during her trip? What themes kept recurring in her discussions with these men?
12. How did her love affair with Mathias affect her?
13. By the end of her trip in Nepal, do you think her feelings towards Mathias changed? If so, how? What was the turning point?

14. What have you learned from this book? Did you take away any ideas that might change your life? Was your perception of the world altered in any way?
15. What part does fear (physical or psychological) play in this story? What did you feel were the most fearful moments in the memoir? The most joyful moments?
16. Did you find cause for optimism despite the conditions of poverty the author described? Did she shed light on the reaction of Westerners to the plight of many of the people she encountered?
17. The author visited South Africa during a tense period before the end of apartheid. What were some of the dilemmas and issues in the book with which her friends and the country, as a whole, were struggling? Discuss some of Meg's experiences and interactions with various acquaintances in South Africa.
18. In India, although the caste system is outlawed, describe some of the instances where the discrimination against lower castes played out in the book. What did the author learn from those experiences?
19. What issues does the book speak to: Aging? Divorce? Comparison between East and West? Interdependence of all cultures? Courage to change? Pushing the limits of endurance? Loneliness? Happiness? Briefly describe the experiences speaking to each topic.
20. What is required of a woman traveling alone in the world? Did you relate to the author's solo backpacking experience? What would you have done differently?
21. How did this eight-month journey change the author--her perception of herself and her perception of the world?
22. What were the most significant lessons you, personally, brought away from this book? And what did you feel was its most important message?

** The author is available for telephone conference calls during the question and answer period of a book club meeting.*

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