

THE PRESENCE OF SUPREME POWER IN PAULO COELHO'S THE ALCHEMIST

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ABSTRACT

The Alchemist, there is a frequent reference to the universe; it influences everybody's journey and works in tandem with them. The Alchemist traces the path of Santiago, a young Spanish shepherd who is compelled to follow his dream of finding hidden treasure in Egypt. To do so, he must leave the comfort zone of home, learn to trust the "Soul of the World," and believe that there are forces in the universe that want us to be happy. In order to find happiness, however, Santiago must first discover his "Personal Legend" that is to say; he must to discover what he is meant to do in the world. Fortunately, Santiago soon takes the first step in his acquisition of happiness: he listens to his heart and overcomes fear. As Santiago continues his sometimes-painful journey, he discovers that one cannot be dissuaded from pursuing a "Personal Legend," even if the choices seem impossible to bear. The end result for anyone who does so, Coelho assures his readers, is physical and spiritual reward.

Paulo Coelho was born on August 24, 1947, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Brazilian novelist known for employing rich symbolism in his depictions of the often spiritually motivated journeys taken by his characters. Coelho was raised in Rio de Janeiro. He rebelled against the conventions of his Roman Catholic upbringing and, as a result, was temporarily committed to a psychiatric hospital by his parents. Coelho dropped out of law school in 1970 and traveled through South America, Mexico, North Africa, and Europe. In 1972 he returned home and began writing pop and rock music lyrics with Raul Seixas, a well-known Brazilian singer and songwriter. In 1974 Coelho was briefly imprisoned for alleged subversive activities against the Brazilian government. Again in *The Alchemist*, Coelho refers to love, but this time as a means of communication, the most important part of the language that the entire world spoke the language that everyone on earth was capable of understanding in their heart. In contrast to Coelho's definition of love as "always new," he calls it "something older than humanity, more ancient than the desert." Combining the similar with the dissimilar in multiple novels of this author, love becomes not only a powerful emotion, but also an infinite journey that existed before time itself, and continues on into the future of humanity.

Coelho's writings have a vein of reference to the Supreme Power, Allah, God and other divine names. In *The Alchemist*, there is a frequent reference to the universe; it influences everybody's journey and works in tandem with them. The Alchemist reads a book containing the story of Narcissus. According to legend, Narcissus kneeled every day beside a lake to admire his reflection, until one day he became so fascinated with his own beauty that he fell into the lake and drowned. The goddess of the forest appeared at the lake and found the water transformed into salty tears. She asked the lake why it cried for Narcissus,

assuming it had admired Narcissus's beauty. The lake replies that it was enjoying its own beauty reflected in Narcissus's eyes.

A recurring dream troubles Santiago, a young and adventurous Andalusian shepherd. He has the dream every time he sleeps under a sycamore tree that grows out of the ruins of a church. During the dream, a child tells him to seek treasure at the foot of the Egyptian pyramids. Santiago consults a gypsy woman to interpret the dream, and to his surprise she tells him to go to Egypt. A strange, magical old man named Melchizedek, who claims to be the King of Salem, echoes the gypsy's advice and tells Santiago that it is his Personal Legend to journey to the pyramids. Melchizedek convinces Santiago to sell his flock and set off to Tangier. When Santiago arrives in Tangier, a thief robs him, forcing him to find work with a local crystal merchant. The conservative and kindly merchant teaches Santiago several lessons, and Santiago encourages the merchant to take risks with his business. The risks pay off, and Santiago becomes a rich man in just a year.

And dreams are the language of God. When he speaks in our language, I can interpret what he has said. But if he speaks in the language of the soul, it is only you who can understand. (TA 13)

Santiago decides to cash in his earnings and continue pursuing his Personal Legend: to find treasure at the pyramids. He joins a caravan crossing the Sahara desert toward Egypt and meets an Englishman who is studying to become an alchemist. He learns a lot from the Englishman during the journey. For one, he learns that the secret of alchemy is written on a stone called the Emerald Tablet. The ultimate creation of alchemy is the Master Work, which consists of a solid called the Philosophers Stone that can turn lead to gold, and a liquid called the Elixir of Life that can cure all ills. Santiago learns the Englishman is traveling with the caravan to the Saharan oasis of Al-Fayoum, where a powerful, 200-year-old alchemist resides. The Englishman plans to ask the alchemist the secret of his trade.

As it turns out, the caravan must make an extended stop in Al-Fayoum in order to avoid increasingly violent tribal wars taking place in the desert. There, Santiago falls in love with Fatima, who lives at the oasis. During a walk in the desert, Santiago witnesses an omen that portends an attack on the historically neutral oasis. He warns the tribal chieftains of the attack, and as a result, Al-Fayoum successfully defends itself against the assault. The alchemist gets word of Santiago's vision and invites Santiago on a trip into the desert, during which he teaches Santiago about the importance of listening to his heart and pursuing his Personal Legend. He convinces Santiago to leave Fatima and the caravan for the time to finish his journey to the pyramids, and he offers to accompany Santiago on the next leg of his trip.

While the alchemist and Santiago continue through the desert, the alchemist shares much of his wisdom about the Soul of the World. They are mere days away from the pyramids when a tribe of Arab soldiers captures them. In exchange for his life and the life of Santiago, the alchemist hands over to the tribe all of Santiago's money and tells the soldiers that Santiago is a powerful alchemist who will turn into wind within three days. Santiago feels alarmed because he has no idea how to turn into the wind, and over the next three days he contemplates the desert. On the third day, he communicates with the wind and the sun and coaxes them to help him create a tremendous sandstorm. He prays to the Hand That Wrote

All, and at the height of the storm he disappears. He reappears on the other side of the camp, and the tribesmen, awed by the power of the storm and by Santiago's ability, let him and the alchemist go free.

Treasure is uncovered by the force of flowing water, and it is buried by the same currents... If you want to learn about your own treasure, you will have to give me one-tenth of your flock... (TA 25)

The alchemist continues to travel with Santiago as far as a Coptic monastery several hours from the pyramids. There, he demonstrates to Santiago his ability to turn lead into gold using the Philosopher's Stone. He gives Santiago gold and sends him off. Santiago begins digging for the treasure at the foot of the pyramids, but two men accost him and beat him. When Santiago speaks to them about his dream vision, they decide he must have no money and let him live. Before leaving, one of the men tries to illustrate the worthlessness of dreams by telling Santiago about his own dream. It concerns a treasure buried in an abandoned church in Spain where a sycamore tree grows. The church is the same one in which Santiago had his original dream, and he finally understands where his treasure is. He returns to Spain to find a chest of jewels and gold buried under the tree, and plans to return with it to Al-Fayoum, where he will reunite with Fatima, who awaits him. Through this novel, the reader can conclude it this way, human values can be saved from devils of frustration and vengeance, if a sum of huge money is given to someone to safeguard the community from losing its purity. That sounds funny.

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