

BOOK REVIEW

“ALCHEMIST, An Epic Journey”

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“Alchemist By Paulo Coelho”

“Alchemist” was first published in 1988 and is written by Brazilian Author Paulo Coelho. It was originally written in Portuguese but by year 2012 it was translated into 67 languages. It is one of the most bestselling books in history by having 65 million copies sold out. It has also set the Guinness World Record for most translated book by a living author.

“The Writer”

Paulo Coelho was born in Brazil to an engineer father, but since his teenage he always wanted to be a writer. He was a natural rebel to traditional ways. When he was 17 his opposition to follow the typical path and introversion led his parents to admit him into a mental institution, from where he escaped three times, before being released at the age of 20. After that, on his parent wishes he enrolled in a law school giving up his dream to be a writer. But he dropped out after 1 year and started living life as hippie by traveling various countries around the world. In 1982 he wrote his first novel “Hell Archives” which didn’t make a big impact. In year 1986, Coelho life took a drastic turn when he walked the 500-plus mile Road of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, and the spiritual awakening he experienced helped him to start living up to his own dream. He wrote an auto biographical book “The Pilgrimage” about this journey. A year after this book he wrote “Alchemist” which was written in only two weeks and was initially published in a small publishing house in the quantity of 900. The publishing house decided to not to reprint it. But in 1994, the biggest publishing house in USA, Harper Collin decided to publish the book and it become instantly famous.

Now since the publication of alchemist, Paulo Coelho generally publishes one book a year. In total Coelho has written 30 books and has sold more than 175 million books in over 170 countries worldwide, and his works have been translated into 80 languages.

Coelho also writes up to three blog posts a week at his blog. Paulo Coelho is the writer with the largest community online. The author has more than 25 million fans only on his Facebook main page and more than 10 million followers on Twitter. He also has accounts on Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr, among others. He manages his own social communities and has a strong interaction with his readers.

“The Protagonist”

Paulo Coelho crafted the protagonist of his immensely famous novel, directly from his soul. Santiago is a young Andalusian shepherd who is on breach of adulthood and love to roam free in green pastures around and faraway from his home. He is mature, thoughtful and is a risk taker. He is the one who dared to throw away the social pressure and lived up to his passion that was traveling.

Santiago parents wanted him to be a priest, therefore he attended seminary until he was 16 year old. He studied Latin, Spanish and theology but his heart longs to explore the world more than knowing about God. Being passionate he summoned up courage and told his father that he didn't wants to be a priest, but wanted to travel the world. His father was a wise man, he had years of experience and could see that his son has set his heart upon traveling but still to be sure he told him what he had learned from years of observation.

“People from all over the world have passed through this village, son. They come in search of new things, but when they leave they are basically the same people they were when they arrived.” But when his son insists, he guided him to the possible way of following his dreams. **“The people who come here have a lot of money to spend, so they can afford to travel. Amongst us, the only ones who travel are the shepherds.”**

And this is why Santiago became a shepherd. His father gave him blessing and three gold coins but said **“Someday you'll learn that our country side is the best.”** Despite his father's true words, Santiago could sense the unfulfilled desire of his father that was buried deep inside. A desire that was still alive but was hidden carefully. In the struggle of managing a stable life style for his family, his father pushed aside the impulse to travel faraway lands. Writer conveys that sometimes we are so occupied with maintaining our basic needs of life that we forget what we desire most.

Santiago didn't like to answer people when they asked him why he chooses a life on foot, rather than the comforts of seminary. He was sure that people would not understand. Since his first step out of home he saw many places and owned a few things, but most important was that he was able to live out of his dream every day. He sought new roads as much as it was possible. Traveling appealed to him because he could always make new friends but he wasn't needed to spend all of his time with them.

“When someone sees the same person every day, they windup becoming a part of that person's life. And then they want the person to change. If someone isn't what others want them to be, the others become angry. Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives but none about his or her own.” That was Santiago theory of life, He didn't want to influence people neither he wanted someone to lead him. He was free soul who cherished his freedom above all.

Even though he left the seminary to chase his dream of exploring the wild, he loved to read. He always kept a book with him. **“Better still to be alone with one's book. They tell their incredible stories at the time when you want to hear them.”**

The boy was a risk taking bold person who was not afraid of doing what his heart wants him to do. First he decided to go to a gypsie woman to get the interpretation of his dream, even though he had heard about their bad reputation. Then he decided to find the treasure by following his dream and going into a country that he has never been before. He credits his shepherding for his brave nature. **“A shepherd always takes chances with wolves and with drought, and that’s what makes a shepherd’s life exciting.”**

From the very start of the story, the philosophical yet simple nature of the hero is revealed on us by writer. Santiago ponders over things around him, often his sheep. He thought that some mysterious energy bound his life to that of his the sheep, with whom he had spent past two years. The flock and shepherd were so used of each other that they even knew the each other schedule. He had always believed that sheep were able to understand him. He read them aloud, his favorite parts from the books, he would tell them of loneliness and the happiness of a shepherd in the field. He once told a girl, “I learn more from my sheep than that from books.”

But he sometimes gets frustrated by the amount of trust sheep put on him. The author brilliantly put into words the bitter reality of life. Living things start trusting each other so much that they eventually forget how to think on their own. They trust blindly and dangerously. Talking about his sheep, boy thinks that **“If I become a monster today and decided to kill them, one by one, they would become aware only after most of the flock had been slaughtered. They trust me and they have forgotten how to rely on their own instincts because I lead them to nourishment.”**

Santiago often compares life of human being to the lives of sheep. He observed that his flock live all their days in the same way, the only thing that concerned these creatures were food and water. They never have to make decisions. They were faithful animals, but the problem was that they weren’t even aware of the fact that they are walking a new road every day. They don’t see that fields are new and the season have changed. That’s the main difference an animal and a human have, while animals only care for food and water, Human beings rise above their basic needs and fulfill greater feats in life.

The boy was considerate, he was always thinking and making his attitude more better than before. He possessed a jacket to protect him from night cold. But in the day’s heat it becomes a burden for him. In the words of the novelist He explained his behavior by saying this **“When he thought to complain about the burden of its weight, he remembered that, because he had the jacket, he withstood the cold of dawn. We have to be prepared for the change, he was grateful for the jacket’s weight and warmth.”**

Santiago has reached the threshold of maturity. He had a typical heart of a man, on whom a woman could affect with so much intensity that they forget the joys of their carefree wandering. At first he develops a deep affection for the merchant daughter living in the town. It was because of that girl, he for the first time experience the desire to live in one place forever. He spent a whole year in the hope of meeting her and didn’t allow himself to think about the possibility that some one richer may have asked her hand before he can meet her again. **“It’s the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting.”**

“The Story”

On his journey through different roads One day Santiago comes to an old church where he decided to spend his night. For two days he continues to dream a same dream. In his dream he saw that a child appear in the felids where he is with his sheep, The child begin to play with animals than suddenly she took Santiago both hands and transport him to the Egyptian pyramids. Then she tells him that “if you come here, you will find a treasure.” And just as she was about to show him the location, he woke up both times.

Boy decided to ask a gypsy woman for interpretation, who simply tells the boy that he must go to the pyramids in Egypt, and find the treasure the child told him about. Santiago was disappointed by the simple interpretation of his dream. The old gypsy women assure him **“It’s the simple things in life that are most extraordinary, only wise men are able to understand them.”** But He didn’t take the old women seriously.

When he was in the town, he met a strange old man who knew how to read. The man takes the book that Santiago was reading and declares that that book had same topic as all the other books in the world have. He said **“it describe people’s inability to choose their own destiny. And it end up saying that every one believes in the world’s greatest lie, which is at certain point in our lives we lose control of what is happening to us, and our lives become controlled by our fate.”**

When old men told the boy that he was the king of Saleem and he knew about his dream, at first boy think that he was being tricked by gypsy women and this old man. But the old king astonishes him by telling Santiago things about his self that he had never told anyone. King told Santiago that he have succeeded in discovering his destiny. But Santiago had no idea what destiny was? King explained to him, **“It’s what you always wanted to accomplish. Everyone when they are young knows what their destiny is. At that point of their lives, everything is clear and everything is possible. They are not afraid to dream and to yearn for everything they would like to see happen to them in their lives. But as time passes, a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their destiny.”**

Through the king, Paulo Coelho conveys the basic theme of his Novel,

“When you want something, all universe conspire in helping you to achieve it.”

He says, **“Whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it’s because the desire originated in the soul of the universe. It’s your mission on earth.”** The king urges the boy to go to Egypt and find the treasure, which he was destined to. At first he hesitated to give up all of his flock and his previous life of a shepherd and to go chasing after a crazy dream. But he was naturally the man who loved change, challenge and adventure. Life was offering him a great opportunity to wander in unknown yet exciting place where a mysterious treasure awaits him. The temptation was hard to resist, and finally he decided to follow his destiny. The king of Salem instructs him to follow the

path of omen, **“God have prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that He left for you.”** He then gave him a white and a black stone, which will help in reading the omens.

Santiago reaches Africa, he felt sick in a strange country with a new culture and language. He didn't know Arabic Language, and was robbed on the first day of his travel. But the boy was courageous and did not lose his spirit. He started working for a Glass merchant to save money for traveling to Egypt.

The glass merchant was a good man, Santiago teach him to read omens. Through this character the Author explains the difference between a doer and a thinker, a man who wants to realize his dream Santiago and a man who just want to dream Glass Merchant. **“You dream about your sheep and the Pyramid but you are different from me, because you want to realize your dream. I just want to dream about Makah. I have already imagined a thousand times crossing desert, arriving at the plaza of scared stone, the seven time I walk around it, but I am afraid it would all be disappointment, so I prefer just to dream about it.”**

Santiago Lived in the city of Tangier for one year and earned enough money to travel with caravan to the Egypt. When he leaving the city, He reminisces that His sheep didn't taught him Arabic but they taught him that there is a universal language of enthusiasm. Tangier city didn't felt strange to him, he had conquered that place.

In his journey through the desert he met an Englishman, who like himself has met the king of Saleem, who also gave English man a black and a white stone. Englishman was going to Al Faroum, Egypt to seek a legendary Alchemist who was said to be 200 years old. The boy realize in this journey that, **“The closer one gets to realizing his destiny, the more that destiny becomes his true reason for being.”** The English man was immersed in his books throughout the dessert but Santiago found the desert more interesting than reading. He was learning to be modest by the vastness of desert. The never ending trail taught him what a little space man occupies in this world. The English man understood the soul of the world; he said **“Everything on earth is being continuously transformed, because the earth is alive. And it has a soul. We are part of that soul, so we rarely recognize that it is working for us”**

Seeing each other, the English man and Santiago tried to switch their ways of learning. The Englishman invites boy to read his book and Santiago tell him to observe and watch desert more. But in the end this experiment turned out to be failure and Boy thought, **“Everyone has his own of learning things, his way isn't same as mine nor mine as his, but we are both search of our destiny.”**

They finally reach oasis and the caravan decided to stay there for few days instead of continuing their journey because of the tribal war that was about to happen. There Santiago saw a young woman, with whom he fell in love. Fatima, the girl is shown by the author as the true girl of dessert; she was spirited and was brave. She encouraged Santiago to continue forward his journey, telling him that she was not afraid of being left alone by him, she said to the boy, **“If I am really a part of your dream you will come back one day. I am a dessert women and I am proud of that. I want my husband to wander as free as the wind that shapes the dunes. “**

During one of his walk in the dessert Santiago see an omen which predicted the attack on the neutral Oasis that he was staying. He warns the chieftain of the tribe and as result saves Al Fayyoom from destruction. When the legendary alchemist sees the feat of Santiago, he makes him his student. He urges the boy to not to linger in Oasis and to seek out his destiny, with his guidance Santiago again started traveling toward pyramids. The alchemist tells him something important that he needed to know, **“Before a dream is realized, the soul of the world will test everything that was learned along the way. It does this so we can master the lessons we have learned as we moved toward our dream. That’s the point at which most people give up. Every search begins with the beginners luck. And every search end with the victor being severely tested.”**

When the Alchemist and Santiago were few days away from pyramids, a tribe of Arab soldiers capture them. The alchemist gives to the tribe money and tells the soldiers that Santiago is a powerful alchemist who will turn into wind within three days, Santiago was at first afraid because he didn’t know how to turn in wind but Alchemist keep his strength up, he said **“Don’t give in to your fears, If you do, you won’t be able to talk to your heart. There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.”** On the appointed day, Santiago communicates with elements in world to communicate to the soul of the world and he truly disappear from the place he had stood by turning up into wind and appearing on the farther sight. The soldiers release them with honor. On a point Alchemist also bade him farewell as now Santiago had peruse his destiny alone.

The boy rode toward pyramids, listening to his heart who would tell him where the treasure was buried. When he finally reached the pyramids, he wept with tears of happiness. His heart was telling the story of the shepherd with pride who once herded his sheep in the pasture of Andalusia. But suddenly he was attacked by two men, who beat him up. Before leaving one of them told the boy, **“A man should not be stupid, two years ago, I had a recurrent dream too. I dreamed that I should travel to the fields of Spain and look for a ruined church where shepherd and their sheep slept. In my dream there was a sycamore growing out of the ruins of sacristy and I was told that if I dug at the roots of the sycamore, I would find a hidden treasure. But I was not stupid to cross the entire dessert just because of a recurrent dream.”** And then the two thugs left the boy alone. In the moment revelation come to him, Finally Santiago knew where his treasure was. He returns to Spain, to the church where he had seen the dream and then find his chest of treasure. Finding the treasure he plans to go back to Fatima.

“Key Points”

- When you want something, all universe conspire to give it to you.
- Every man is tried severely at the end of his trial, don’t lose your strength, it is the time when you have to be most strong.
- If you are caught by adversities, face them and try to stand up again.
- All humans play very important role in the history of world, some may don’t realize it.
- It is not beneficial for you get everything at every time. Just like Santiago, if he would have found this treasure when he was in Spain, he could not have the knowledge and wisdom he had now.

“References”

- Wikipedia (Introduction Of Author)
- Alchemist Novel