

Book Review:

Title: "The Alchemist"

Author: Paulo Coelho

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The dream is the small hidden door in the deepest and most intimate sanctum of the soul, which opens to that primeval cosmic night that was soul long before there was conscious ego and will be soul far beyond what a conscious ego could ever reach." Carl Gustav Jung once constituted this brilliant theory.

I was drawn to the 'Alchemist' dream as it led me all the way through the odyssey to Andalusia, Tangier, Egypt, Sahara Dessert, and back to Spain..... I was awoken. It was a dream, and just a dream. This dream revealed to me the knowledge of life, the destiny of mankind.....

The acclaimed novel, "The Alchemist", a legendary and mythical story, thus commences with a paradoxically simple yet complex dream, a dream that a mediocre young shepherd named Santiago experienced in the land of Andalusia, situated on the continent of Spain. It was not just an ordinary dream; dreams that people seldom recalled and reminisced afterwards, but a "recurring" dream about a hidden treasure buried among the mystifying Pyramids of Egypt. Yet this is not the orthodox story of the vain life of a medieval chemist searching for the key to transform invaluable metal into valuable gold, in order to create the final "Master Work" – the "Philosopher's Stone" and the "Elixir of Life", as time and life erodes away. This is a book about philosophy, psychology, humanity, one's soul and dreams – dreams which are illusive yet elusive.

At first glance, this is a thin and considerably undemanding book, and yet the subtle message it is trying to convey is immensely insightful and unfathomable. At the outset, Santiago was oblivious of the meanings shrouded behind the dream itself. He led a solitary life, in which he had the same old routine everyday, traveling all the time, flocking his sheep,

shearing them and selling their wool. To a certain extent, Santiago was quite contented with his life.

Santiago actually signifies people who response to dreams with negativity at the first place, but with adequate guidance, he would be able to recognize and pursue his dreams vigilantly.

An example of "guidance" is his unanticipated yet enlightening encounter with a mysteriously disguised old king, which made a decisive turn to Santiago's life. The Old King revealed that the dream was a call from God to pursue his destiny. He persisted that Santiago must embark on such an odyssey to the treasure. The Old King was actually a spiritual figure which symbolized motivation and encouragement. When one was about to give up, he would conjure his magic and trigger innovation.

Therefore the protagonist heeded the Old King's advice, forsaken his dreary and mediocre life, and commenced his journey, from his hometown to Tangier. There he met and worked for the crystal shop owner, since Santiago was robbed, leaving him completely broke and spiritually shattered.

The shop owner was "xenophobic", cowardly and stubborn. He never tried to change his shop for improvements, and he never dug up the courage to attend the Muslim Pilgrimage, for he was afraid of change. He signifies people who take pleasure in living in their own dreams, their utopias. They want a never-ending dream, for they fear contingencies during the process of variation in reality. These people never thrive, as a result of their cowardice, and they serve as a negative example to all of us.

After a year of work, Santiago determined to go to Egypt after all. He met an English Alchemist, and they traveled together. The "Englishman" is another example of cowards. He was "Atychiphobic", and therefore, he did not even take the first step to attempt extracting the final "Master Work". He was afraid of failure. This sort of people allows fear to stifle their dreams and make their previous effort die in vain, which is a kind of attitude we should never embrace.

All along, a fateful encounter with the Alchemist awaited him in the wilderness of the Sahara Dessert. They finally met each other, and what the Alchemist taught Santiago was far beyond any wealth one could possibly possess. It was the knowledge of life, our soul and "personal legend".

The wise and insightful Alchemist actually resembled "Jehovah", the Almighty God. He taught Santiago to listen to his heart, and left him clues to discover further insights. He was like a source of light that illuminates everyone's path. The alchemist showed Santiago that in every entity's soul lived the spirit of God Himself, that mankind was born with a natural divinity, and our every act was a miracle performed by God. The final message – everyone can perform miracles, and exert their dreams, as long as we have faith in God. Our hearts are the innate radios for speaking to God!

Ultimately, Santiago discovered that the seemingly distant treasure was actually right before his eyes at his own doorstep. The entire journey was only a test of his will and persistence, and in the end, he found unlimited elucidation.

The foremost idea of this book is actually a person's dream and "*personal legend*"; while the five main characters introduced above actually symbolized different personalities in reality respectively. These personalities have different roles and behaviours in the pursuit of dreams, ranging from cowardice to vigilance. Cowardice hinders our path to success. That is why the former American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said that, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself!"

Ever since God created men, we were born with a destiny to realize our dreams. As the book suggested, "*To realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation.*" If we listen to our hearts, and always assert an unyielding belief that we can surpass conventional realms, we can truly achieve our dreams.

Society advances, and technology flourishes. Dreams are essential. It is the magic that sparks and triggers progress. Otherwise, we shall still be cavemen chasing dinosaurs with our clubs, and we will never discover new insights. The renaissance Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei could never prove that the Earth is round, and the great American inventor Thomas Edison would never find a need for electrical lamps!

After all, to want to be what one can be is the purpose of life. Our dreams and desires sustain our lives. To drain one's dream is to drain one's soul. The book resembles a recipe of a consequential and momentous life, a life with dreams, and mankind is invited to be the chefs. It is a meal that

everyone is capable of cooking, for the sole procedure is to acquire all the ingredients, not from the supermarket at the neighbouring block, but at the enduring shop in our hearts – ‘Souls “R” US’.

In reality, you always dream of something pioneering and astonishing. You try to fulfill the sole “*obligation of life*” – “*to realize one’s true destiny*”, as the book suggested. Similar to Santiago, the most crucial part is to determine to abandon your current way of living, to spread out your wings and reach for your goals. If you break through the barrier encircling your heart, you are worthy to move closer to your objective. At this point, you are tested severely. You would be disheartened and forced to confront innumerable obstacles. However, as the book suggests, “*every search ends with the victor severely tested.*” If you pass this intricate and thorny test, triumph would be within easy reach.

The treasures we always long for is usually right before our eyes, only that our eyes are always cloaked by the false idea that treasures are distant, almost elusive, like the fabled pot of gold at the end of the rainbow in fairy-tales. Often do we search for treasures elsewhere, but it’s usually at our doorstep completely unaware.

Mark Twain once said, “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do..... *Explore. Dream. Discover.*” Men regret about things when it is already at a point of no return. If we are doomed to be miserable, why not fulfill our dreams, explore, discover, instead of leading a life of misery?

“The Alchemist” is not just a book. It is a lamp that lights up our path and provides us with infinite illumination. It shows to people who are trapped in an abyss their true destiny.

Like Martin Luther King Jr. said, “I have a dream”.

Everyone has a dream. It is an indubitable truth, and our dreams are constantly awaiting us, search with your heart and it will respond to your call.....

I conclude by composing the following verse:

**Seek, and thou shalt find thy future,
Thou shalt allow thy dreams to nurture.
It is mankind's sole commitment,
Thou be rewarded upon fulfillment.
In Pursuit of Dreams thy world conspires,
Thy work shalt never cease to inspire.
Luck and nature thou cannot rely,
He who dreads failure doth be denied!**

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