

"SHKP Book Club" - Book Review Competition
Kwan

By: Angel Mok, Yu

Coelho, Paulo. *The Alchemist*. London: Harper Collins, 2002.

The Alchemist, written by Paulo Coelho, is a fascinating book about an Andalusian shepherd boy in quest for a hidden treasure near the pyramids in Egypt. Through traveling in a long journey from Spain to Morocco, the boy, Santiago, finally learned that the Soul of the World is in his heart. Santiago experienced much hardship in the process of pursuing his dream. At the end of his adventure, Santiago got what he deserved through his dedicated efforts. He discovered that the treasure in fact lies in his heart, and that it's the journey itself, the discoveries he has made, and the wisdom he has gained. He has come to realize that life is so full of wonderful things, and that if one follows his dreams and has faith in his pursuit, his dreams will finally come true. Santiago never gives up trying to find out about his destiny. He understands that his destiny is predestined by God, and He will only help those who help themselves.

The novel tells us that everything is possible as long as we really want it to happen. Even a shepherd boy can make his dream come true, though he is just a common mortal. When we really want something to happen, the whole universe will conspire to make our dreams come true. This is the main idea of the novel, *The Alchemist*, and is also the philosophy behind Coelho's writing. Although the conventional wisdom is that life is unfair, this book, however, tells a success story, brimming with hopes. All the evils in this world notwithstanding, Santiago has found the truth meaning of life by his own determination. Santiago dreams of hidden treasures, and knows the difficulties he will have to encounter and to overcome in his endeavour to find them. He has the courage to pursue what he is determined to find as revealed in his dream. After listening to "the signs", the boy decided to venture out to seek for the realization of his dream. One day, the boy met an elderly man, who was the King of Spain. He talked to him, and gave him two stones, Urim and Thummin, as an encouragement to Santiago going on his adventurous journey. These stones were actually intended to provide him with some good omens. On his way to Egypt, Santiago met some exciting persons, and saw what he considered to be the greatest things in the world. He found a job in the shop of a crystal merchant, and he worked very hard in order that he could earn enough money to go to Egypt.

Santiago traveled the desert days after days, enduring all the hardships of having to go through the torturous windstorms, and suffering the extreme heat of the scorching sun in the desert on his way. During his journey he met an Englishman who has learned a lot of information about the oasis from a camel driver. On his way to the pyramids, Santiago began to wonder what an alchemist was. Later, he read books about alchemist, and he wished one day he could meet a true alchemist. Having lived on the desert for a few weeks, Santiago noticed that there is a universal language that is understood by all things created in the world. He tried to learn about his surroundings, and he began to realize the true meanings of many things. Eventually Santiago encountered an alchemist at the oasis. They became good friends, and the alchemist guided Santiago along on his way to the pyramids. From the alchemist, Santiago learned how to turn lead into gold, why the alchemist is an alchemist, and his philosophies of life.

Love is in the core of our existence and can be found in all God's creations, as Santiago has discovered in his adventure. Santiago said to Fatima, a woman in the desert he met, "I love you because the whole universe conspired for me to come close to you." Somehow they became separated from each other. Love is a very powerful emotion, and it's God who gives people love. In the end, Santiago found and understood the true meaning and significance of love. This really means a lot to him in his life as time goes by. At the end of his journey, which was in fact his quest for the meaning of life, he and Fatima were reunited. By then, Santiago realized he should believe in love and that the love is eternal.

This book conveys another message, and that is simple things are the most valuable things in life, and only wise people will appreciate them. The novel skillfully combines words of wisdom and philosophy, and presents to us the meaning and beauty of simplicity in a simple language. The dream Santiago pursued made him a better person in the end when he has found the real treasure, which is the knowledge he gained through his extensive expedition to Egypt. This novel is indeed

October 3rd, 2006

enthraling to read, and one can learn so much from reading this book, in particular the true meaning of love and life.