



# The Alchemist

*By: Paulo Coelho*

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Paulo Coelho uses *The Alchemist* to show what, in reality, a well-written story is: a reiteration of the author's own personal philosophies and bold beliefs about a certain topic – which, in this case, is the purpose of life.

*The Alchemist* follows the journey of Santiago – a simple shepherd boy, just traversing life with little to no real purpose aside from herding his flock. But he is literate and quite philosophical, intrigued just by observing common things, and by questioning these things further, realized possible deeper meanings. His heart longed to travel (the reason why he gave up his chance of being a priest to instead become a shepherd), also filled with a burning desire to be more than he ever was; this desire pulsating through his veins so powerfully that he is willing to take risks most men wouldn't take; all in pursuit of a great treasure that begun to mysteriously manifest itself within his dreams. The boy, almost in reach of a guaranteed future with a flock that obeyed him and a girl that potentially awaited his returning, undergoes a series of encounters with a gypsy woman and Melchizedek, a wise old man that seems to know Santiago's past, understands his present, and predicts his future. Melchizedek explains to him that the world is all connected by the Soul Of The World, and that all things were connected, as they were created by the same hand – the God who created it all. These events change his mind and inspire him to search out that foretold treasure, which according to the wise old man, the universe had in store for him – the boy would just have to study the different omens in life that would guide him to his destiny.

This sets our main character off on a journey out of his familiar home in the Andalusian countryside, and travel to the relatively alien lands that hold the famous Pyramids of Egypt, in search of his destiny. On his journey, he meets various people – a crystal merchant, who in return for his employment gives him a place to stay; an Englishman, whose obsession with the same Soul Of The World leads him to alchemy, the idea of penetrating the Soul to attain one's destiny; Fatima, a beautiful girl that steals Santiago's heart; and a strange 200-year old man who only went by *The Alchemist*, who would eventually aid Santiago in realizing his final destiny. Santiago would go back home, rich in wealth, but also in wisdom, in experience, and most importantly, in faith.

Throughout its course, the book brilliantly expresses Paulo's most intricate thoughts about how life works. With numerous references to Biblical characters like Abraham, Joseph, and even the lesser known centurion with an ailing daughter who turns to Jesus in faith for his daughter's healing, Paulo talks about God's hand in creation, in how all things are one in essence, because He made them all. Each has its own purpose, and everything must, ultimately, carry out its purpose. With this strong focus on spirituality, it considers various religious ideas and connects them all together. Paulo also leaves room for introspection and analysis by developing ideas and theories about life that deal with seeing into the minute details to attain a bigger picture, and thus understand life and its oddities. He does so by leaving these postulations as if they were thought of by the characters themselves, thus leaving the impression that each character happened to be a philosopher himself/herself, when in reality, they just possess 'thoughts' left open to interpretation, stoking the fire of curiosity within a reader to see between the lines.

On the contrary, that very same quality that sets this book apart also can be a detriment to its reputation – that being that at the end of the day, these thoughts can be boiled down to being Paulo's and Paulo's alone. A book is no longer the author's once it is released; it belongs to the individual readers, for them to understand and apply. But one can only derive as much meaning from each little lesson hidden within the storylines as the writer had allotted room for – implying that regardless of how much one can analyse its contents, it still remains the idea of a sole human and his experiences, which isn't always to be trusted; to err is human, after all. And as for the fact that the book was written originally in Spanish and later translated to English to reach a wider audience, the story unwillingly loses its original meaning, because there are just some things that get lost in translation, and that's the way it is.

But maybe that in itself is a clever lesson reiterating the two central ideas that Paulo's story repeats throughout on various occasions: that if one wishes hard enough for something, the universe will conspire to make it happen, and that there exists a language spoken by all that knows no restrictions – the language of love. Maybe that same universe has carried out its sequence of events to retain the meaning of the story, that despite crossing linguistic boundaries, its message still remains attached to the words, able to resonate with whosoever wishes hard enough to understand its underlying message. A message that is easy to understand, relatable, and engages the reader in a powerful discussion with himself/herself about the meaning of life. Despite its fictional characteristics, the book connects together so many truths and facts, that it could convince an unassuming reader that this is, in fact, what life is all about. A worthy read, *The Alchemist* proves to be an entertaining intellectual journey that, just like the world it explains, has more to it than meets the eye.

*The Alchemist* is, without doubt, an open letter from Paulo to the world, conveying his emotions and philosophies to anyone that is willing to spend a few hours in reading it, and it will leave you with a newfound love for the world.