

The Alchemist – Paulo Coelho

It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting, he thought.

It's the simple things in life that are the most extraordinary.

That was what made traveling appeal to him—he always made new friends, and he didn't need to spend all of his time with them. When someone sees the same people every day, as had happened with him at the seminary, they wind up 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.

“It's a book that says the same thing almost all the other books in the world say,” continued the old man. “It describes people's inability to choose their own Personal Legends. And it ends up saying that everyone believes the world's greatest lie.”

“What's the world's greatest lie?” the boy asked, completely surprised.

“It's this: that at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie.”

He was sure that it made no difference to her on which day he appeared: for her, every day was the same, and when each day is the same as the next, it's because people fail to recognize the good things that happen in their lives every day that the sun rises.

I left my father, my mother, and the town castle behind. They have gotten used to my being away, and so have I. The sheep will get used to my not being there, too, the boy thought.

The wise man listened attentively to the boy's explanation of why he had come, but told him that he didn't have time just then to explain the secret of happiness. He suggested that the boy look around the palace and return in two hours.

“Meanwhile, I want to ask you to do something,” said the wise man, handing the boy a teaspoon that held two drops of oil. “as you wander around, carry this spoon with you without allowing the oil to spill.”

The boy began climbing and descending the many stairways of the palace, keeping his eyes fixed on the spoon. After two hours, he returned to the room where the wise man was.

“Well,” asked the wise man, “did you see the Persian tapestries that are hanging in my dining hall? Did you see the garden that it took the master gardener ten years to create? Did you notice the beautiful parchment in my library?”

The boy was embarrassed, and confessed that he had observed nothing. His only concern had been not to spill the oil that the wise man had entrusted to him.

“then go back and observe the marvels of my world”, said the wise man. “You cannot trust a man if you don't know his house.”

Relieved, the boy picked up the spoon and returned to his exploration of the palace, this time observing all of the works of art on the ceilings and the walls. He saw the gardens, the mountains all around them, the beauty of the flowers, and the taste with which everything had been selected. Upon returning to the wise man, he related in detail everything he had seen.

“But where are the drops of oil I entrusted to you?” asked the wise man.

Looking down at the spoon he held, the boy saw that the oil was gone.

“well, there is only one piece of advice I can give you,” said the wisest of wise men. “The secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, and never to forget the drops of oil on the spoon.”

But the sheep had taught him something even more important: that there was a language in the world that everyone understood, a language the boy had used throughout the time he was trying to improve things at the shop. It was the language of enthusiasm, of things accomplished with love and purpose, and as part of a search for something he believed in and desired. Tangier was no longer a strange city, and he felt that, just as he had conquered this place, he could conquer the world.

“When you want something, all the universe conspires to help you achieve it,” the old king had said.

But he was able to understand one thing: making a decision was only the beginning of things. When someone makes a decision, he is really diving into a strong current that will carry him to places he had never dreamed of when he first made the decision.

The closer he got to the realization of his dream, the more difficult things became. It seemed as if what the old king had called “beginner’s luck” were no longer functioning. In his pursuit of the dream, he was being constantly subjected to tests of his persistence and courage. So he could not be hasty, or impatient. If he pushed forward impulsively, he would fail to see the signs and omens left by God along his path.

“I waited all afternoon and evening,” he said. “He appeared with the first stars of the evening. I told him what I was seeking, and he asked me if I had ever transformed lead into gold. I told him that was what I had come here to learn. He told me I should try to do so. That’s all he said: ‘Go and try.’”

“I had to test your courage,” the stranger said. “Courage is the quality most essential to understanding the Language of the World.”

“there is only one way to learn,” the alchemist answered. “It’s through action. Everything you need to know you have learned through your journey. You need to learn only one thing more.”

“My heart is a traitor,” the boy said to the alchemist, when they had paused to rest the horses. “It doesn’t want me to go on.”

“That makes sense,” the alchemist answered. “Naturally it’s afraid that, in pursuing your dream, you might lose everything you’ve won.”

“Well, then, why should I listen to my heart?”

“Because you will never again be able to keep it quiet. Ever if you pretend not to have heard what it tells you, it will always be there inside you, repeating to you what you’re thinking about life and the world.”

“You mean I should listen, even if it’s treasonous?”

“Treason is a blow that comes unexpectedly. If you know your heart well, it will never be able to do that to you. Because you’ll know its dreams and wishes, and you will know how to deal with them.”

“Why don’t people’s hearts tell them to continue to follow their dreams?” the boy asked the alchemist.

“Because that’s what makes a heart suffer most, and hearts don’t like to suffer.”

“Are you crazy?” the boy asked the alchemist, when they had moved on. “What did you do that for?”

“To show you one of life’s simple lessons,” the alchemist answered. “When you possess great reassures within you, and try to tell others of them, seldom are you believed.”

“If a person is living out his Personal Legend, he knows everything he needs to know. There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.”