

## Coelho's *The Alchemist*: The Pursuit of Happiness

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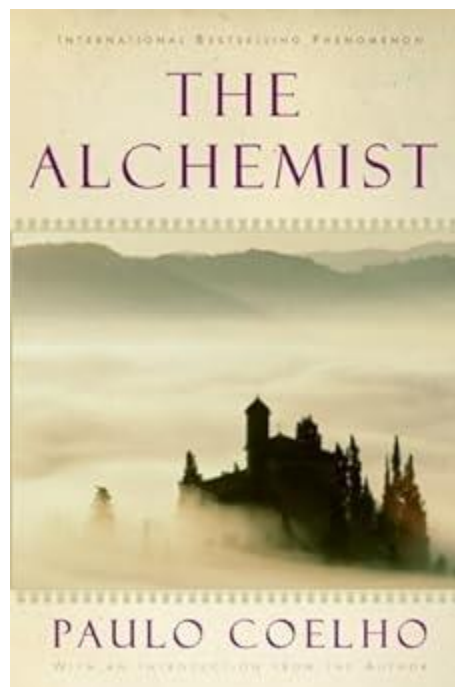
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### Abstract

The idea behind this paper is to understand the importance of happiness in the life of a person. Martin Seligman, a well-known psychologist designed the PERMA model with five core elements of psychological wellbeing and happiness. According to Seligman these five elements can help people reach a life of fulfillment, happiness and meaning. This model can also be

applied to literature to understand happiness quotient of characters. Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, is one such example that tells the story about pursuit of happiness. Santiago, the protagonist of this novel goes beyond human caliber to chase his dreams, in other words we can say that in the pursuit of happiness he achieves the unachievable.

**Keywords:** Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*, happiness, PERMA model, journey, destiny.

*The Alchemist* is a spellbinding novel considered as masterpiece. It is a story of a shepherd boy named Santiago who pursues his drive for finding hidden treasures that he visualizes in his dream. He undertook adventurous journey to realize his dream, through this adventurous journey he comes across a wide variety of people and places, faces different sorts of hazards, explores the significance of love and most remarkably, discovers the true meaning of life on top of getting hold of the treasures he had been questing for. Happiness plays an important role in all the novels of Coelho. Almost all his protagonist is in the search of happiness. Happiness plays a guiding role in everyone's life. However, what makes one happy? The answer to this question may vary person to person. Happiness is an emotion; it is a state of mind. Everyone is in the search of happiness. We all need something to be happy. It is the most essential driving force of life. Though, the path towards true happiness is not the easy one. Happiness demands consistent effort and sacrifice. It is important to mention here that meaning of happiness is unique to everyone. Some find happiness in power; some may find happiness in money and for some happiness lies in physical pleasure. Thus, here it becomes essential to understand what happiness actually stands for? In the words of Compton and Hoffman,

Happiness can't be bought or asked, it have to be pursued. Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy, (Compton & Hoffman 4).

Happiness or positive attitude has become global phenomenon, everyone is talking about ways to attain true happiness, some look for it in religious texts, some find answer in philosophical ideologies. The prospect of happiness vary person to person. It is related to well-being, flourishing and quality of life. Definition of happiness always changes with the times

under the human circumstance. Our great master Aristotle states that happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence. As it is described in his book that 'which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else'. (Nicomachean Ethics, 30-34).

In the words of Socrates happiness can only be achieved through self-effort. True happiness can only attain through self-knowledge. Socrates believed that true happiness could only be achieved through self-knowledge and that only this examination of one's universal soul was true wisdom (Compton & Hoffman 11).

Socrates believed that happiness cannot be found outside rather inside. One who is searching for the happiness outside overlooking the inside cannot attain true happiness. To attain ever fading happiness we have to go deep inside, without making inside correct, happiness could not be attained. Body can give pleasure not happiness, it is matter of soul and mind not the body. A true happy man is satisfied with his/her life. And through inner happiness we can attain satisfaction. Thus, we can say that, if we make our inside correct, it will reflect through our outer personality.

The PERMA model was designed by Martin Seligman with five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness. Seligman believes that these five elements can help people reach a life of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning. This model can also be applied to literature to understand happiness quotient of characters.

### **P – Positive Emotion**

Positive emotions play a very important role in overall happiness quotient. It is not only about happiness, it is also about joy, affection, love, hope, gratitude, kindness, care, dignity, delight, interest etc. It is much deeper than mere smiling, it takes an effort to have an optimistic outlook towards life. If we develop this one habit in our life most of the problems of our life will be sorted, cultivating positive emotions helps in individuals wellbeing and flourishing as these helps to build different resources such as physical, psychological, emotional and social which in turn makes individuals resilient and improves overall wellbeing Positive emotions can positively

affect our relationships, behavior towards others, our overall persona, mental peace and we will be least prone to anxiety and other mind related issues. However, it is difficult to see positive or feel positive in every situation of our life. However, with constant effort and by adapting some strategies which can be applied to build positive emotions like devoting time with people we love, learning some new mental stimulating activities, playing musical instruments, listening to music that feels with positivity and new enthusiasm for life, surrounded by inspirational thoughts, being grateful towards our life, helping others, being selfless etc.

### **E – Engagement**

Engagement of any kind that demands our full attention, when we lose track of time is good for our personal happiness. We all need something that demands our full attention, it can be anything like, playing an instrument, dancing, singing, playing a sport, doing some research, or even a project work. We all need something in our lives that entirely absorbs us into the present moment, creating a ‘flow’ of blissful immersion into the task or activity. This type of ‘flow’ of engagement is important to stretch our intelligence, skills, and emotional capabilities.

### **R – Relationships**

We humans are social animals, we need human connection and love to thrive in our life, a strong and trustworthy relationship can save us from various trauma and mental anxiety. In the quest of material gains, we have forgotten the importance of human relationships, we need to rejuvenate this important aspect of our life. Building positive relationships with our parents, siblings, peers, and friends are important to spread love and joy. Having strong relationships gives us support in difficult times.

### **M – Meaning**

The purpose meaning of our life has to be much bigger than the mere pursuit of material gains and material pleasure. We need to indulge ourselves more into such activities that provide meaning to our life. It can be anything like being helpful and kind towards others, being less judgmental and less egoistic, being selflessly involved into bigger purpose of our life. Such

meaning gives people a reason for their life and that there is a greater purpose to life. To understand the greater impact of your work and why we chose to the pursuit that work will help us +enjoy the tasks more and become more satisfied and happier that helps people find profound meaning in themselves and their lives.

## **A – Accomplishments**

When we set an aim and work towards it, it gives us a sense of entitlement and meaning to our life. On the other hand, when we achieve our goals in life, we are rewarded with feelings of joy, pride and accomplishment. In addition, by regularly challenging ourselves with self-improvement in mind, we can accomplish our goals and progress with new ones that will create a cycle of fulfilment. In this way we can discipline ourselves and self-improvement will come naturally to us. Setting goals and working towards it give purpose and meaning to our lives. And a meaningful life will always be a happy one.

Martin Seligman proposed the PERMA model to assess happiness. According to him there are five indicators of happiness; these are pleasure, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishments. According to the analysis Santiago successfully accomplishes three out of five PERMA's happiness indicators. These are a long-lasting relationship, a powerful meaning of life, and accomplishments.

### **Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist***

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* is one such example that narrates the story about pursuit of happiness. Santiago is a young boy who in the beginning of the tale not satisfied with his present state of life, he wants to improve the situation and follow his dream. In his pursuit of his happiness, he achieves the unachievable. he goes beyond human caliber to follow his dream. This one courageous act of his opens the doors of new avenues for him, where he meets new people and faces new situation every day, that makes him not only happy but wise. Such is journey of Santiago, who sacrifices everything from comfort, security, and love only to experience true happiness.

Dream plays a significant role in this novel, Santiago's struggle with destiny starts with his dream. His dream motivates him to undertake a difficult journey. Through this journey he not only realizes his dream but also attains true happiness and satisfaction. On the journey he is joined by many people from all walks of life. His journey enables him to solve the mysteries of life and universe. At the end he becomes the wise person. On this journey he is accompanied by various people who teach him about true happiness of life. He learns about the power of dream, love, sacrifice, courage, faith and many more. At the end of this novel, he does not only find the treasure, he is also attaining happiness.

In this novel *The Alchemist*, the progress of the plot entwined with the journey of Santiago, who is in search of true happiness, the main plot focuses on the journey of Santiago. Santiago is a shepherd boy from Andalusia who undertakes a journey to Egypt. As a shepherd boy, Santiago is dissatisfied with his current life and decides to make it better. Santiago feels that he needs to follow his happiness. One day, he has a dream about finding treasures around in Pyramids at Egypt. The dream leads him into a meaningful journey that teaches him about strife to realize his dream and to find his happiness. On the journey, he meets many people who teaches about life, love and many things. But he gets something more important than just a treasure trove in the end. He finds his happiness. Life and happiness are entwined to each other like a couple and there are things that must be done. Choices must be made in order to pursue happiness.

When we read the novel closely, we realize that many factors lead Santiago to pursue his happiness. The first and foremost reason is his family, especially his father;

Santiago is born in a simple farm family but he gets proper education till he is sixteen. His father wants him to become a priest someday in purpose to bring a pride for the family (Coelho 8).

There is a conflict of interest between Santiago and his father. His father has different expectations from him, he wants him to become a Priest and receive respect and admiration from his family, relatives and neighborhood. However, he couldn't stand on the expectation of his

father, his path is different from what his father has chosen for him. Giving up on his dream is not an option for him, he learns this from his father, who himself wanted to explore the world, but could do that due to family obligation and responsibility.

The boy could see in his father's gaze a desire to be able, himself, to travel the world—a desire that was still alive, despite his father's having had to bury it, over dozens of years, under the burden of struggling for water to drink, food to eat, and the same place to sleep every night of his life. (Coelho 9)

Santiago doesn't want to be like his father; unlike his father he gathers the courage to follow his dream. He doesn't want to give up on his dream. He submits himself to the uncertainty of the adventure. Living a regular life like his father is not meant for him. He knew that working hard in the field day and night would not satisfy his soul, he could never unleash his true potential. Subject of happiness may vary person to person. In the case Santiago and his father, both of them have different perception towards happiness. What stand true for Santiago's father may not stand true for Santiago.

According to Seligman, 'pleasure and satisfaction are the parameters of happiness' (Seligman 1). Happiness can be measured through satisfaction, how satisfied we are in our life. In other words, we can say that satisfaction leads us to the happiness. In the novel the alchemist, Santiago is not satisfied with his current state of life, he doesn't want to live at same place forever, he wants witness the unknown. He is not satisfied with he being a shepherd boy, he wants to explore uncertainties of life. He is eager to know the purpose of his life. He is assured that his purpose is not mere being an ordinary boy. Thus, he delves deep into himself to look for the purpose of his life:

His purpose in life was to travel, and after two years of walking the Andalusian terrain, he knew all the cities of the region (Coelho 8).

It can be related to Socrates' statement that happiness can actually be attained through human efforts. The purpose of life can only be attained through human efforts. Santiago not only commits himself to the uncertainty of life also puts his best foot forward to realize his true

purpose of life. He leaves everything behind his family, friends, comfort, security and the most important his sheep whom he loved and cared to pursue his dreams. His father tries to dissuade him, but he listens to his heart and moves forward with the purpose of his life.

Santiago says to his father that he wants to see the land and the castle of the outsider and wants to know more than Andalusia (Coelho 9).

Although how much we love and enjoy carefree life of a wanderer, deep inside our heart we crave to share the experiences of our life with another person. Santiago also wants to have a partner with whom he can share the joys and sorrows of his life. He wants someone who can understand and share the purpose of his life, this feeling of loneliness encourages him to pursue happiness. This feeling of loneliness depicted in following lines:

But in his heart, he knew that it did matter. And he knew that shepherds, like seamen and like traveling salesmen, always found a town where there was someone who could make them forget the joys of carefree wandering. The day was dawning, and the shepherd urged his sheep in the direction of the sun. They never have to make any decisions, he thought. Maybe that's why they always stay close to me. (Coelho 6)

Santiago now understands the importance of companionship in life, he also looks for a partner with whom he can share his joys and sorrow with. This urge makes him realize that he is not completely satisfied with his life. He feels derived from happiness and companionship, yet he chose to surrender himself to the destiny.

As I already pointed out, dreams play an important role in this novel. Due to the dream about the treasure somewhere in Egyptians pyramids, he risks everything and commits himself to look for that treasure. Treasure is used symbolically in this novel. However, it becomes the triggering point through all the endeavors of Santiago. This dream about treasure occurs twice to him. He listens to his heart and, against all odds, sacrifices everything to witness his dream.



I have had the same dream twice, he said. I dreamed that I was in a field with my sheep, when a child appeared and began to play with the animals. I don't like people to do that, because the sheep are afraid of strangers. But children always seem to be able to play with them without frightening them. I don't know why. I don't know how animals know the age of human beings. The child went on playing with my sheep for quite a while, continued the boy, a bit upset. And suddenly, the child took me by both hands and transported me to the Egyptian pyramids. Then, at the Egyptian pyramids, —he said the last three words slowly, so that the old woman would understand— “the child said to me, if you come here, you will find a hidden treasure. And, just as she was about to show me the exact location, I woke up. Both times. (Coelho 13)

Santiago dreams about the hidden treasure in Egypt, not once but twice. However, every time he couldn't see the exact location of treasure. This recurring dream of hidden treasures ignites his curiosity to know about this dream. He consults a dream interpreter to know about his dreams. However, she doesn't help him much to know about his dreams. Finally, he allures her with ten percent share from treasure if she helps him to find the treasure, even though she doesn't help much. And he decides not to think about dreams again.

However, the appearance of a mysterious man changes his mind set about happiness. He decides to pursue his dreams. The old man teaches him about the omens, he learns the power of instinct and subtleness of universe. This world has its own soul, only a fully awoken spiritual person can experience it. He decides not to abandon his dreams. Old man changes his entire perspective about happiness:

“In order to find the treasure, you will have to follow the omens. God has prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that he left for you.” Before the boy could reply, a butterfly appeared and fluttered between him and the old man. He remembered something his grandfather had once told him: that butterflies were a good omen. (Coelho 29)

Santiago learns to read omens from old man. These omens are key to happiness, the more we connect our soul with the soul of universe, we would easily read those omens. Old man suggests him not to lose hope while perusing his dream, only brave can surrender himself to the uncertainty of life. Hope and faith are the two most important tools to deploy while pursuing dreams. Old man further says that hope and faith will shield him through this tough yet rejoicing moment of life.

Santiago's journey to chase his dream is not hassle free. He undergoes many difficult situations while his journey to pursue his happiness. In fact, these difficulties and somewhat makes his journey interesting. It tastes his perseverance and patience. Every time he has to take tough decisions, his life solely dependent upon the choices he makes. Every difficult situation made him more mature as a person and he is more committed towards his goal than before.

Every time Santiago has to make tough choices to pursue his dreams. It begun with going against his family mostly his father and becoming a shepherd in Andalusia his family wanted him to become a priest; but he carved a different path for himself, later after having dreams about treasure somewhere in pyramids, he again decides to go against his family to search for that treasure. We have to make tough choices in order to follow our heart and destiny. Universe tests us against our choices, weather we really deserve it or not.

Santiago's struggle not going to fade up soon. When he reaches Egypt, he loses all his money. He not only loses money but also his desire to go for treasure hunting. In other words, we can say he loses his faith and hope that he could ever realize his dream that he could ever be happy and joyful. He gets dejected, fear overpowers him. His state of mind reflected through these lines:

But now I'm sad and alone. I am going to become bitter and distrustful of people because one person betrayed me. I'm going to hate those who have found their treasure because I never found mine. And I'm going to hold on to what little I have, because I'm too insignificant to conquer the world. (Coelho 39)

Santiago emerges as a strong man; his difficulties could not deter him from his goal. He stands against all the odds and leaps towards his goal with more strength and determination. He now learns from his past mistakes and moves forward.

Santiago falls in love with a local Arabian girl Fatmah. He loses his sense of purpose after meeting her, he is no more interested in finding the treasure. He needs constant companionship of her. He doesn't desire to leave her. It is Fatimah only, who convinces Santiago to pursue his dream. She wants him to undertake the journey to find the treasure. He convinces him that she will wait for him. She knows how to wait. Finally, Santiago accepts Fatimah's advice to continue his journey. Santiago again gets ready to pursue his dream.

I am a desert woman, and I am proud of that, I want my husband to wander as free as the wind that shapes the dunes. And if I have to, I will accept the fact that he has become a part of the clouds, and the animals and the water of desert. (Coelho 51)

Santiago faces many challenges during his journey to find the treasure. He never allows these challenges to turn him into a bitter person. He stands tall against all the challenges that life throws at him. In the process of finding the treasure he loses all his possession. In many occasions he wanted to give up on his dreams. However, he never let those negative emotions overpower his optimism. During the course of his journey, he meets the love of his life, even though he doesn't allow himself to be distracted by this love. With heavy heart and support from Fatima, he again undertakes the journey. These lines show his determination:

Even if he never got to the Pyramids, he had already traveled farther than any shepherd he knew. Oh, if they only knew how different things are just two hours by ship from where they are, he thought. Although his new world at the moment was just an empty marketplace, he had already seen it when it was teeming with life, and he would never forget it. He remembered the sword. It hurt him a bit to think about it, but he had never seen one like it before. As he mused about these

things, he realized that he had to choose between thinking of himself as the poor victim of a thief and as an adventurer in quest of his treasure. (Coelho 42)

Santiago could stand tall against all the challenges because he never let pessimism take over optimism. In this way optimism provided a much-needed shelter during the time of difficulties. Every challenge he faced during the journey made him more mature and victors. Santiago meets various people throughout his journey, each one of them enriches his knowledge about the world. He meets the Merchant Man or the Old King, the Englishman in the oasis, and the Alchemist who has taught him the meaning of love and how to live a life with it. Santiago learns from them that to be free is not the only requirement to live a meaningful life; he learns that establishing long term relationship with other human being is more important. That relation cannot be easily ignored because it already becomes the part of Santiago's life. The most important relationship for Santiago that changes Santiago's life is his meeting with Fatimah, a charismatic desert woman who becomes Santiago's love of life. Fatimah brings Santiago's spirit to pursuit his happiness and gives meaning to his life.

But my heart is agitated," the boy said. "It has its dreams, it gets emotional, and it's become passionate over a woman of the desert. It asks things of me, and it keeps me from sleeping many nights, when I'm thinking about her. (Coelho, 128)

Santiago emerges as a wise and mature person; in this way he gets much more than mere finding the treasure. He finds the true wisdom of life. He understands the meaning of life, he now values relationship. His relationship with Fatimah teaches him about true love. He now understands wealth is much more than the money and treasure. In this way we can say that even before finding the treasure he already got the treasure.

During his journey, Santiago meets with many people who use the word 'Maktub', it is an Arabic word. It can loosely be translated as 'it is written'. The word typically appears just as the Santiago is about to turn to a new chapter in his quest, usually by taking a huge risk or abandoning a comfortable situation. It becomes a reassuring refrain for Santiago, because it reminds Santiago to see his actions in context of fate. As Santiago learns, fate always cooperates

with those in pursuit of their personal legends, so as long as he remains focused on his goal, he can find comfort in the fact that his destiny has already been written in the history of the world. On the way to realize his destiny, Santiago gets the help of many people. They help him to read and understand the omens. Omens offer Santiago guidance on his journey and reassure him that the soul of the world has endorsed his journey.

As Melchizedek explains in this novel, omens make up part of the universal language of the world, and if Santiago taps into this language, he can always find the meaning of his destiny. For instance, when the stones Urim and Thummim drop from Santiago's pocket, he chooses to consider the event as an omen. In doing so, he continues to feel that the universe conspires to help him, and he finds meaning in the seemingly random event. Omens also serve to demonstrate Santiago's spiritual growth throughout the story. The omens that Santiago experiences grow in relevance from being small, limited events to important visions that affect many lives. The vision of the hawks and approaching armies that Santiago has in al- Fayoum, for example, tells Santiago of an assault on the oasis that could lead to the deaths of hundreds. That his omens become more and more important signifies that Santiago is getting closer to understand the pure language of the world.

Santiago learns to believe in his dreams; he gets the insight to understand the soul of the world. His experiences enable him to understand the language of the world. Now he resolves to pursue his personal legends. At the end he comes out as a victor. This way of life, brings pleasure in life of Santiago. Pleasure can only be derived from the things that have the capacity to satisfy us. Pleasure is connected to satisfying bodily needs for survival, such as thirst, hunger, and sleep. Whereas enjoyment comes from intellectual stimulation and creativity. This element of the model is one of the most obvious connections to happiness. Being able to focus on positive emotions is more than just smiling; it is the ability to be optimist and view the past, present, and future in a positive perspective. This positive view of life can help us in relationships, work, and inspire us to be more creative and take more chances.

Santiago finally finds happiness in his journey, once he digs out the treasure and finds the gold. He passes all the obstacles just to prove his heart that the dream is not a lie. The hidden

treasure is real. After everything that he has been through, Santiago successfully accomplishes a lot of things in life. He finally finds his hidden treasure which is his true love and his unforgettable experiences.

The boy fell to his knees and wept. He thanked God for making him believe in his destiny, and for leading him to meet a king, a merchant, an Englishman, and an alchemist. And above all for his having met a woman of the desert who had told him that love would never keep a man from his destiny. (Coelho 160)

Santiago realizes that happiness not only resides in accomplishing the dreams but also in having courage to pursue the dreams. He proves that journey is more interesting than the destiny. Throughout his journey he faces numerous obstacles and difficulties but all these experiences enrich his life with profound wisdom. At the end he regrets nothing. He emerges as a victor who has the courage to follow his dream:

As Santiago said to himself, “It’s true; life really is generous to those who pursue their destiny,” the boy thought. (Coelho 166)

Santiago successfully overcomes all the obstacles and achieves his happiness. Martin Seligman purposed PERMA model to assess happiness. According to him there are five indicators of happiness; these are pleasure, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishments. According to the analysis Santiago successfully accomplishes three out of five PERMA’S happiness indicators. These are a long-lasting relationship, a powerful meaning of life, and accomplishments.

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