

1/11/19

Dear Paulo Coelho,

Like every teenager, I've had my fair share of existential crises. Why am I here? What is the point in living if we are all going to die anyway? I remember when we were kids, people would ask us what we wanted to be when we grew up. We were a class of future astronauts, veterinarians, firefighters, and pirates. Although it was an innocent question, it encouraged us to dream about the future. But now, I am a junior in high school, and that seemingly harmless question is keeping me up at night. *What do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you want to go to college? What do you want to study?*

I have never been one of those people that have always known what they wanted to do in life. In middle school, I was interested in innovation. Finding solutions for real-life problems was fun. In high school, I was exposed to many exciting clubs and activities. When I created documentaries, I assumed the role of a journalist, asking questions that sparked dialogue on topics such as energy, education, and free speech. In DECA, I was able to challenge myself to propose a business concept that appeals to customers. At science fairs, I presented my project and got people excited about my research. All these activities were fun to do, but people often told me that I was "sticking my fingers in too many pies." To add to all this, I wanted to explore the world and adventures it had to offer. How was I to pick one single thing that I wanted to do for the rest of my life?

I first read *The Alchemist* in my English class last year. I remember being intrigued by the very first sentence: "The boy's name was Santiago." To my teacher's dismay, I couldn't help but to finish the book after the first day it was assigned. The boy's journey and adventures made for an exciting read, but the deeper meaning of the book was lost to me. I soon forgot all about it as I got busier with making documentaries, DECA, and science fairs, throughout the rest of the year.

Here I was once again at the start of a new school year. It felt like a lifetime had gone by since sophomore English class. I don't know why I picked up *The Alchemist* a second time. Maybe it was a coincidence that a copy was sitting on my shelf, maybe I was looking for answers to my many questions, or perhaps it was simply *maktub*.

It felt like an entirely different book when I read it the second time. *The Alchemist* taught me what it was to have a Personal Legend and the importance of not only discovering it but fulfilling it. The story of the boy's journey reassured me that "God has prepared a path for everyone ... you just have to read the omens that he left for you". It was okay that I didn't know what my Personal Legend was. It was not only comforting but liberating to realize that, "...when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." I wrote these lines down and stuck them on my corkboard. These are the words that I wake up to every day and go to bed to every night. They reassure, comfort, and encourage me. I know I have a path set for myself, and I'll know my Personal Legend when I feel it in my heart and soul. I used to empathize with the boy's feeling of indignance when he finally found the treasure; what was the purpose of going on this long-drawn-out journey to travel back to where it all began? Why couldn't the Gypsy tell him where exactly the treasure was? But, as King of Salem told the boy, "The secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, and never to forget the drops of oil on the

spoon.” I have been reminding myself not to miss the gardens and tapestries, but while not forgetting my Personal Legend.

When the boy dreamt under the Sycamore tree, his vision of his Personal Legend was vague and unclear, much like my understanding of *The Alchemist* the first time I read it. The boy had to come back to the Sycamore tree where it all began, just as I too had to come back to your book to realize it held the answers I was looking for.

So... I'm still learning. I'm still figuring it all out. But I know one thing for sure: I'm ready for the challenge. I'm ready for the adventure. And, it'll be the adventure of a lifetime.

Sincerely,

Arundathi Nair