**Discussion Questions**

1. At the start of his journey, when Santiago asks a gypsy woman to interpret his dream about a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids, she asks for one tenth of the treasure in return. When Santiago asks the old man to show him the path to the treasure, the old man requests one tenth of his flock as "payment." Both payments represent a different price we have to pay to fulfill a dream; however, only one will yield a true result. Which payment represents false hope? Can you think of examples from your own life when you had to give up something to meet a goal and found the price too high?

2. Paulo Coelho once said that alchemy is all about pursuing our spiritual quest in the physical world as it was given to us. It is the art of transmuting the reality into something sacred, of mixing the sacred and the profane. With this in mind, can you define your Personal Legend? At what time in your life were you first able to act on it? What was your "beginner's luck"? Did anything prevent you from following it to conclusion? Having read *The Alchemist*, do you know what inner resources you need to continue the journey?
3. One of the first major diversions from Santiago's journey was the theft of his money in Tangiers, which forced him into taking a menial job with the crystal merchant. There, Santiago learned many lessons on everything from the art of business to the art of patience. Of all these, which lessons were the most crucial to the pursuit of his Personal Legend?

4. When he talked about the pilgrimage to Mecca, the crystal merchant argued that having a dream is more important than fulfilling it, which is what Santiago was trying to do. Do you agree with Santiago's rationale or crystal merchant's?

5. The Englishman, whom Santiago meets when he joins the caravan to the Egyptian pyramids, is searching for "a universal language, understood by everybody." What is that language? According to the Englishman, what are the parallels between reading and alchemy? How does the Englishman's search for the alchemist compares to Santiago's search for a treasure? How did the Englishman and Santiago feel about each other?

6. The alchemist tells Santiago "you don't have to understand the desert: all you have to do is contemplate a simple grain of sand, and you will see in it all the marvels of creation." With this in mind, why do you think the alchemist chose to befriend Santiago, though he knew that the Englishman was the one looking for him? What is the meaning of two dead hawks and the falcon in the oasis? At one point the alchemist explains to Santiago the secret of successfully turning metal into gold. How does this process compare to finding a Personal Legend?

7. Why did Santiago have to go through the dangers of tribal wars on the outskirts of the oasis in order to reach the pyramids? At the very end of the journey, why did the alchemist leave Santiago alone to complete it?

8. Earlier in the story, the alchemist told Santiago "when you possess great treasures within you, and try to tell others of them, seldom are you believed." At the end of the story, how did this simple lesson save Santiago's life? How did it lead him back to the treasure he was looking for?
10 Questions with Paulo Coelho -- Goodreads Interview

Goodreads: The Alchemist was first published in 1988. Now 20 years later, how do you feel your writing style or priorities as a writer have changed over the many years of your career? Would you describe writing as your own Personal Legend?

Paulo Coelho: Last year I wrote a column about the way I felt about the release of my book, The Witch of Portobello. I was in Lisbon, just hours before the book was released in Portugal and in Latin America. I was walking along the streets of this marvelous city thinking about the moment when the first reader would touch the book in the shelves of the bookstore. I was excited and realized that I was still able, after publishing many books, to feel exactly the same way as in the release of my first book, The Pilgrimage. Of course, with success, the dimensions change but the inner feeling of sharing my soul with others remains intact.

My personal legend has always been to become a writer. I'm glad I can say that I'm fulfilling my dream. But this must not be interpreted as "the end of the line" - on the contrary - I have to commit everyday in order to stay in this path that I've chosen. One is constantly challenged - even by success.

GR: You have stated that each of your books was written over a period of only two to four weeks. Describe a typical day spent writing.

PC: When I finally feel I'm ready to embark in a new book, I always go through the following cycle that takes me from two weeks to a month.

Before going to bed I have everything planned: I will wake up early and dedicate myself solely to the novel I'm writing. The only thing is, when I wake up I decide to browse through the net, then it's time for my walk. When I come back I quickly check my mails and before I know it it's already 2:30 p.m. and time to have lunch. After which I always take a sacrosanct nap. When I wake up at 5 p.m. I come back to my computer, check another set of emails, visit my blogs, read the news. Then it is already time for dinner - and at this point I'm feeling extremely guilty for not fulfilling my goal of the day. After dinner I finally sit at my desk and decide to write. The first line takes a bit but quickly I'm submerged in the tale and ideas take me to places that I never thought I would tread. My wife calls me to go to bed but I can't, I need to finish the line, then the paragraph, then the page...It goes on like this until 2 - 3 a.m. When I finally decide to go to bed, I still have many ideas in my mind-that I carefully note down on a piece of paper. I know though that I'll never use this - I'm simply emptying my mind. When I finally rest my head on my pillow I make the same oath - that the next day I'll wake up early and that I'll write the whole day long. But this is useless: the next day I wake up late and this cycle starts all over again.

GR: Tell us about The Experimental Witch. How do you envision the finished product?
PC: I'm an "Internet addict" and decided last year to release 1/3 of *The Witch of Portobello* in my blog [www.paulocoelhoblog.com](http://www.paulocoelhoblog.com) in several languages. Readers from all over the world could read the first 10 chapters and leave their comments. It was a great experience and last year in July I wanted to further this interaction with my readers by inviting them to adapt the book for the screen. As you know there are 15 narrators and filmmakers are invited to chose one and film all the scenes where they interact with Athena. Once their video is done they are invited to post it in YouTube. Composers from MySpace are also invited to show their material until the end of May. The rules are equally in my blog in the following address: [http://paulocoelhoblog.com/experimental-...](http://paulocoelhoblog.com/experimental-...)

Since this is an original idea, it's very difficult to predict how the finished product will be. We have many directors in mind to edit the raw material from the readers and the aim is to show the film in Cannes next year and then release it in movie theatres.

*GR*: Unlike many bestselling authors, you have opted not to sell the film rights to your books. *The Alchemist* is the only exception, and you have even tried to buy back those rights for a very high price. What is different about *The Witch of Portobello*?

PC: It's true I've always been reluctant to sell the rights of my books since I think that a book has a life of its own inside the reader's mind. Seldom do I find that film adaptations of books work well. With time, though, I decided to open up this possibility for certain titles of mine like *The Alchemist, Veronika Decides to Die* and *11 Minutes*. I don't like, though, to meddle in these productions.

With the Experimental Witch is different because I decided to invite my readers through the Internet to adapt their vision of the book. It is my way of having a peep into their universe besides of being a true original idea: the first movie made by the readers.

*GR*: With membership on Goodreads, Facebook, MySpace, and others, you have a wonderfully accessible Web presence. How do you feel that the Internet is changing the way people have access to art and artists?

PC: To write is a very lonely activity. When I write a book, I'm face to face with my soul, and this sometimes leads me to paths that I never imagined existed within myself. When I finish a book, I have the feeling I gave birth to something that now is independent of me, something that carries my soul away from my imagination and into the minds and hearts of my readers.

When this happens, it's pure magic: During signings I could see that readers totally understood my questionings and truly shared the experiences. This feedback is also possible through my blogs. I check every day the messages, and I'm sincerely moved by the beautiful words of wisdom that my readers share with me. In a way the Internet is enabling the writer to no longer be alone, to debate ideas, information and to get inspired by the readers.
Goodreads: On your blog, you recently described traveling as the best way to learn. Goodreads has members in more than 200 countries -- do you think the Internet can be used for similar learning and to promote dialogue across national boundaries and language barriers?

Paulo Coelho: Internet is a wonderful tool of communication. Its ability to enable low-cost instant communication regardless of physical boundaries is fascinating and full of promises. Of course, as a medium, it can be used to promote dialogue between people from different cultures.

I've read somewhere something that has fascinated me. That the Internet is also breeding a new and young culture: the culture of super-communicators. Youngsters that were born into the Internet era are actively showing how they can be at once talking on msn, poking a friend in Facebook, up-loading their garage band song into MySpace, up-loading their 30-second film recorded with their telephone on their YouTube account and still have time to play web video games with hundred of other users across the web. When I think of this new generation I see a new culture all together arising. Unfortunately too often people of my generation can't even grasp their children's universe. Yet what the youth is doing, out of intuition and entertainment, is creating a new way of communicating that has nothing to do with the passive TV generation era.

But one has to keep in mind that the Internet, it's a medium and therefore it can be equally used to fire up tensions and provoke ruptures.

GR: As a Messenger of Peace for the United Nations, you recently attended the first United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Forum, a global campaign that aims to eliminate prejudices between cultures. As a writer, what is your role in this campaign and what have you learned?

PC: The type of work that I want to develop with the UN would be the one where I would use culture, the last bridge that in my view remains intact in this divided world, to reassemble people. The power of storytelling is exactly this: to bridge the gaps where everything else has crumbled.

GR: Your work has been translated into 67 different languages, which gives you a remarkably international audience. There must be a large amount of trust involved when working with a translator. How do you feel reading one of your books in a language other than Portuguese affects the reader's experience? Does something get lost in translation?

PC: There's a chain that enables my words to get to the reader's imagination. There are many people involved: my agent, my publishing houses, the booksellers, and of course the translators.

Indeed, there has to be a great amount of trust for the book to reach the safe harbor of the reader's hands. I have to trust the translator. It's a profession I have a profound admiration
for. My father-in-law was a translator and I know how in this line of profession, translators honor the text and diligently try to remain faithful to the essence of it.

GR: The message of The Alchemist, and many of your other books, transcends the definitions of a single religion. Is it one of your goals to provoke inter-faith dialogue?

PC: It's important to distinguish between religion & spirituality. I am Catholic, so religion for me is a way of having discipline and collective worship with persons who share the same mystery.

But in the end all religions tend to point to the same light. In between the light and us, sometimes there are too many rules. Some of these rules are important, others should not blind us, do not diminish the intensity of this light, the soul of the world.

For me, literature and spirituality are the same. In my first book, The Pilgrimage, I wrote about my real journey, my true story.

You see, during my pilgrimage it became increasingly apparent that I wasn't happy and I had to do something about it - stop making excuses. I realized that you don't have to jump through a series of complicated hoops to achieve a goal. You can just look at a mountain and get a connection with God; you don't have to understand the mountain to feel that.

When I first got back from the trip it was an anti-climax. I found it hard to acclimatize to my normal life and I was impatient to change my life immediately. But changes happen when you're ready. It took a few months to realize that I must solely concentrate on writing a book, rather than trying to fill various roles as I had before. The pilgrimage was to be my subject and as I started I took my first step towards my dream.

GR: What advice would you give to a new writer just starting out?

PC: To knock as many doors as possible. That's how I did it in the beginning. People don't think about this now, but becoming a best-selling author was a long journey and I faced many setbacks along the way. For instance, I had a rough time with my second book The Alchemist. It was first published by a small publishing house and even though it sold well, at the end of the first year, the publisher decided to give me back the rights since, according to his words, "he could make more money in the stock exchange." At the time I decided to leave Rio with my wife and we spent 40 days in the Mojave desert. I needed to heal myself from this and when I came I decided to keep on struggling.

I realized that despite the fear and the bruises of life, one has to keep on fighting for one's dream. As Borges said in his writings "there is no other virtue than being brave." And one has to understand that braveness is not the absence of fear but rather the strength to keep on going forward despite the fear.

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