



What is a personal legend?

Paulo Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*

I remember receiving a letter from the American publisher, Harper Collins, which said that: "reading *The Alchemist* was like getting up at dawn and seeing the sun rise while the rest of the world still slept." I went outside, looked up at the sky and thought to myself: "So, the book is going to be translated!" At the time, I was struggling to establish myself as a writer and to follow my path despite all the voices telling me it was impossible.

And little by little, my dream was becoming reality. Ten, a hundred, a thousand, a million copies sold in America. One day, a Brazilian journalist phoned to say that President Clinton had been photographed reading the book. Some time later, when I was in Turkey, I opened the magazine *Vanity Fair* and there was Julia Roberts declaring that she adored the book. Walking alone down a street in Miami, I heard a girl telling her mother: "You must read *The Alchemist*!"

People ask me: What's the secret behind such a huge success? The only honest response is: I don't know. All I know is that, like Santiago the shepherd, everyone needs to be aware of their Personal Legend. What is a Personal Legend? It is God's blessing, it is the path that God chose for you here on Earth. Whenever someone does something that fills them with enthusiasm, they are following their Legend. However, not everyone has the courage to confront their own dream.

Why?

There are four obstacles. First: they are told from childhood onwards that everything they want to do is impossible. They grow up with this idea, and as the years accumulate, so too do the layers of prejudice, fear and guilt. There comes a time when their Personal Legend is so deeply buried in their soul as to be invisible. But it's still there.

If they have the courage to disinter their dream, they are then faced by the second obstacle: love. They know what they want to do, but are afraid of hurting those around them by abandoning everything in order to pursue their dream. They do not realize that love is just a further impetus, not something that will prevent them going forwards. They do not realize that those who genuinely wish them well want them to be happy and are prepared to accompany them on that journey.

Once they have accepted that love is a stimulus, they come up against the third obstacle: fear of the defeats they will meet on the path. Anyone who fights for their dream, suffers far more when it doesn't work out, because they cannot fall back on the old excuse: "Oh, well, I didn't really want it anyway." They do want it and know that they have staked everything on it and that the path of the Personal Legend is no easier than any other path, except that their whole heart is in this journey. Then, the warrior of light must be prepared to have patience in difficult

times and to know that the Universe is conspiring in his favour, even though he may not understand how.

I ask myself: are defeats necessary?

Well, necessary or not, they happen. When someone first begins fighting for their dream, they have no experience and make many mistakes. The secret of life, though, is to fall seven times and to get up eight times.

So, why is it so important to live one's Personal Legend if we are only going to suffer more than other people?

Because, once we have overcome the defeats - and we always do - we are filled by a greater sense of euphoria and confidence. In the silence of our hearts, we know that we are proving ourselves worthy of the miracle of life. Each day, each hour, is part of the Good Fight. We start to live with enthusiasm and pleasure. Intense, unexpected suffering passes more quickly than suffering that is apparently bearable; the latter goes on for years and, without our noticing, eats away at our soul, until, one day, we are no longer able to free ourselves from the bitterness and it stays with us for the rest of our lives.

Having disinterred our dream, having used the power of love to nurture it and spent many years living with the scars, we suddenly notice that what we always wanted is there, waiting for us, perhaps the very next day. Then comes the fourth obstacle: the fear of realizing the dream for which we fought all our lives.

Oscar Wilde said: 'each man kills the thing he loves'. And it's true. The mere possibility of getting what we want fills the soul of the ordinary person with guilt. We look around at all those who have failed to get what they want and feel that we do not deserve to get what we want either. We forget about all the obstacles we overcame, all the suffering we endured, all the things we had to give up in order to get this far. I have known a lot of people who, when their Personal Legend was within their grasp, went on to commit a series of stupid mistakes and never reached their goal - when it was only a step away.

This is the most dangerous of the obstacles because it has a kind of saintly aura about it: renouncing joy and conquest. But if you believe yourself worthy of the thing you fought so hard to get, then you become an instrument of God, you help the Soul of the World and you understand why you are here.