

In Paulo Coelho's book *The Alchemist*, we learn the story of a young Andalusian shepherd who pursues his life's dream despite all consequences. After giving up his home, he travels through numerous adventures before reaching his destination, the pyramids in Africa. While being guided by omens and signs, the boy grows from a young man into a powerful alchemist. In the end, he finds the treasure he had pursued, but he also found true love in a girl named Fatima.

Some people might think that the book is a love story about a young shepherd and the young girl Fatima, but this theme seems to be a minor side theme to me. In my opinion, Paulo Coelho would have provided a more elaborate ending for the young couple. Instead, the book is a love story about the young shepherd and the world he lives in. With trust, courage, confidence, and purpose, our world can change from a random habitat into a meaningful and loving home for our mind, body, and spirit. We are not alienated from the world we live in. When we listen deep within ourselves, we can find the path that we are determined to go. In this sense, I find the central theme to be a love story about humans and the world we live in.

But secondary, the book also serves as a guide for our lives. Together with the boy we learn the lessons that life teaches him about the Language of the Universe, the importance of courage and perseverance, and love itself. When the old alchemist speaks, he speaks directly to us.

My emotional reaction to the book was very positive since I can relate to the boy on so many levels. First, like the boy, I have left home to pursue the dream I have. My dream is the fire that keeps me going and gives my life a special purpose. Despite the problem of confirmation bias, I can see the many ways the universe has provided me with the puzzle pieces that I “only” need to fit together. These pieces consist of people I have met, roads I have taken, and doors that have been opened or closed. Compared to the boy, my journey is still at the bazaar selling crystals.

Second, I also believe in omens and signs that guide our way. Based on Native American spirituality, I believe that animals have many messages for us. All that we have to do is pay more attention to the animals in our lives and learn to interpret their signs. For example, eagles represent a very good, powerful, protective, and guiding force. When I started my internship as wilderness guide and wrangler in Yellowstone Park, I saw an omen on too. On my very first day, an eagle circled above my head before sitting on a mountain cliff watching me. Instinctively, I felt safe and guided on my internship. While this might seem like a coincidence to some, I was even more thrilled when I saw yet another eagle on the last ride of my internship. It was reinforcement in my belief that my entire summer was guided and protected.

In conclusion, reading *The Alchemist* was like hearing the story of a twin brother in a different land, in a different time. While our circumstances might be different, we share a bond and trust in our lives and our world. Life that guides us, and a world we lovingly call home.