

## Stepping forward as your true self

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A book that I think everyone should read at some point in their life is *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho.

*The Alchemist* is an allegorical novel that tells the story of Santiago, A Spanish shepherd boy who, when sleeping under a sycamore tree, near the ruins of an abandoned church, dreams of a treasure buried near the pyramids in Egypt. He consults a fortune-teller and then an old king named Melchizedek, who encourages him to pursue his "Personal Legend," his true purpose in life.

Santiago sells his sheep and embarks on a journey across the Sahara Desert, facing various challenges and learning valuable lessons along the way. He works for a crystal merchant, experiencing both setbacks and success. He joins a caravan and meets an Englishman who is searching for an alchemist.

Eventually, Santiago meets the alchemist himself, a wise and powerful figure who guides him further on his path. The alchemist teaches Santiago about the importance of listening to his heart and realizing that the treasure he seeks is not just material wealth but also spiritual enlightenment. Through his experiences, Santiago learns about love, loss, fear, and the interconnectedness of all things.

Ultimately, after enduring immense hardship and reaching the pyramids, Santiago is robbed and beaten. It is then that his assailants inadvertently reveal the treasure's true location: back in Spain, precisely where his journey began—under a sycamore tree at the ruined church.

Returning home, Santiago unearths a chest of gold and jewels.

The central theme of *The Alchemist* is the pursuit of one's dreams and destiny. It emphasizes the idea that the universe conspires to help those who are determined to achieve their Personal Legend, and that the journey itself is as important as the destination. Ultimately, Santiago discovers that the treasure he sought was not just in a distant land, but also within himself, and that his journey led him to a deeper understanding of the world and his place in it.

I think everyone should read this story because it talks about the journey to discovering and being our true self.

Now I don't actually think that your true self is something you can find straight away. As a small child you had no trouble being your true self – you were unable to be anything other, in fact. But once you discovered that people would be either pleased or angry with you, depending on how you behaved, you started to lose your true self and build the self that would help you get what you wanted in the world – a self that other people liked and found acceptable.

Once you became a teenager, your self began to be shaped less by what you thought would please your parents, and more by what you thought your peers would think. And you are learning to hide parts of yourself that you think others will not like, and to try and be someone you think they will, in order to reach your goals of being successful, popular and happy.

But eventually, you will run out of energy to be this person that you create. Eventually, this self that you create to get what you want from the world will fail you. And you will begin to feel a little lost. You might get depressed or angry. You might begin to lose interest in all the things you thought your life was about.

But eventually it will feel like it is too hard to keep being that person anymore. And this is when you might start the journey home to finding your true self again.

Because that is your treasure – that is the unique and precious thing you have to offer the world; the uniqueness of who you are.

You will, no doubt for many years, hide and dampen your true self in order to be more like everyone else. You will for a while give up the most precious thing about you and exchange it for something more ordinary, something that you think will be more accepted by others.

But if you are lucky, you will one day face the crisis of realising that you cannot be that acceptable person anymore, and you will have to give it up.

This is what I think Jesus was talking about when he talks about losing our lives in order to save them. We must surrender the self that we have created to make everyone like us and think we are a success, in order to rediscover our original self, our true self – the one that was made in the image of God, the one that doesn't really fit into any of the nice boxes that society has available.

This is our treasure – this is the reason we have come to this world. It is the achievement of a whole lifetime to discover and be this true self. But once we discover it, we will realise that it is the only valuable thing we have.

As the spiritual teacher OSHO wrote:  
“Listen to your being. It is continuously giving you hints; it is a still, small voice. It does not shout at you, that is true. And if you are a little silent you will start feeling your way. Be the person you are. Never try to be another, and you will become mature. Maturity is accepting the responsibility of being oneself, whatsoever the cost. Risking all to be oneself, that's what maturity is all about.”