

Chapter II

Interpreting Life through the Prism of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics engages in the exploration of a text, how it is read and understood. It simply means interpretation. Every thought and action of living beings has to be interpreted if the meaning of the same and the intention of the same has to be understood in the required sense. Not only spiritual texts, but literary texts have also to be interpreted. Whether spiritual texts need interpretation is debatable and the conclusion becomes subjective. But actions and thoughts of individuals and literary texts, scientific treatises, legal documents need interpretation if it has to be understood in the exact sense.

In this sense understanding is not mere knowledge, but something beyond knowledge. So “understanding is knowledge in the deeper sense of grasping not just facts but their integration into a meaning whole” (Zimmermann 2). Thus hermeneutics can be considered as an act of integrating different parts of information to arrive at an uncondensed meaning. Hermeneutics has always aimed at discovering the truth about oneself and the world for the sake of wisdom. Philosophers down the ages and pan world have had this one view that all understanding ultimately is understanding of the self. While discerning the texts, how far do the readers endorse or ‘understand’ the authorial meaning.

When the proponents of New Criticism minimised the importance of the author and the authorial intent giving importance to the reader’s response, the text became subjective and relative. Authorial intention and meaning cannot be ignored as E.D Hirsch claims “the author’s intended meaning as the changeless object of understanding of interpretation” (Zimmermann 60). Textual interpretation expands the reader's vision of

the world. Ricoeur opines “texts speak of possible worlds and of possible ways of orienting oneself in those worlds” (Zimmermann 66). As a result it is not necessary that the reader steps into the life of the author nor establish a single meaning. But the understanding of the means of exploring the possibilities of different contours of life as envisioned by the author is necessary. The reader only tries to grasp the propositions about a world the author communicated “by means of the text” (Zimmermann 67).

The power of the language also has to be considered while interpreting. It is the language that turns the environment into a meaningful human world “through the symbolic representations” (Zimmermann 68). Literary texts demonstrate how language works. First language becomes metaphors. These metaphors are not just for embellishment but it is through words that we understand and perceive the world. Hermeneutic thinkers refer in this context the ‘metaphoricity of language that structures our thought’ (Zimmermann 68).

Biblical hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding of the *Bible*. Biblical hermeneutics recognises fourfold understanding in literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical fields. St. Augustine considered signs as very important in understanding the word of God. For God communicates through signs in the scriptures with the believer. He stresses the need for humility and endorses St. Matthew in chapter twenty two (New Testament Psalms Proverbs, Matt.22.37), on love as the heart of Christian faith. Thus humility, love and the knowledge of signs according to St. Augustine became the essential hermeneutics presuppositions for the understanding of the Holy texts.

The fifteenth century saw a resurgence of hermeneutics with humanistic education getting the centre stage. Intrinsic evidence for the meaning of the text was

sought and historical and critical methodology of analysing the texts was deemed right. The Protestant Reformation gave a new impetus to hermeneutics in the interpretation of the *Bible*. John Calvin and Martin Luther with their view that the scriptures interpret themselves made hermeneutics the fundamental aspect in the understanding of the Bible. This led to the viewing of the scriptural texts as secular texts whereby difficult passages and seeming ambiguities were simplified by associating them with contemporary Christian practices.

Hermeneutics as a theory to understand texts came to be recognised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. For Schleiermacher, interpretation of a text involves both grammar interpretation and psychological interpretation as the content of the text is related to its organisational framework. He felt that hermeneutics aided misunderstanding as it takes into account both the grammar and the psychological laws. Schleiermacher's view was that interpretation does not stop with the understanding of words but also knowing the unique character of the author and the authorial point of view.

According to William Dilthey, understanding extends to human actions and its manifestations and moves towards probing their significance. In his *The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life* (1977), he opines that interpretation is only an indirect method of mediation when human expressions are placed in their historical context. So for Dilthey the author is not the centre of interpretation but articulation of that which is expressed in the work. Hermeneutics is taken outside the confines of the author and language and the society are brought in for the construction of a work. Dilthey bases his principle on the three structural levels of the mind, the

experience, expression and comprehension. While experience is the feeling of a situation or an idea or a concept at the personal level, meaning is comprehended when this expression especially in the written form is converted into experience. Comprehension is both comprehension and incomprehension and both these coexist.

Friedrich Schleiermacher is considered as the father of sociological hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, Schleiermacher believes, consists of a set of rules to understand a text. Reading of a text involves a certain amount of subjectivity. The reader's understanding is based on the knowledge of the historical context in which the author wrote his work. It is this view that led Heidegger to frame the hermeneutic circle a reference model to interpret any text.

Heidegger's theory of hermeneutics shifts from interpretation to the ontological view of existence. In Heidegger's hermeneutics the knowing of other minds happens as issues are put in the context of being with human relatedness. Texts are conventionalised expressions of human experiences, conventionalised because experiences of one can be lived by others. And the uniqueness of these experiences are the ones to be interpreted in terms of language used to describe these experiences and the social context in which they happened. This interrelation between the social context and the text can be analysed with the hermeneutic circle where individual parts and the cohesive whole become related to give a unified meaning. The interaction between the text and the context is what constitutes the hermeneutic circle. It is the link between the past events and the result thereof. The hermeneutic circle is based on the idea that every event is linked and proper understanding of this link is what interpretation is.

Gadamer, the student of Heidegger, felt that methodical thinking is a variant to experience. Truth can be understood only by experience and this understanding is always in a flux because of the new perspectives that are gained and this becomes unavoidable. Gadamer makes a point on prejudices in the sense of pre-judgements. Unfamiliarity with the conditions exemplified in the text is the cause of prejudice and this can help us in understanding the text. This condition again warrants the need for exploration with the help of the hermeneutic circle.

New hermeneutics is another significant development in the theory of hermeneutics. It is a methodology that recognises the importance and the use of language in a text. The proponents of this theory identify language as an eventualization in the history of the person who uses it. Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, and James M Robinson are the theorists of New Hermeneutics. Walter Benjamin and Fredric Jameson outlined the theory of Marxist Hermeneutics. Fredric Jameson interprets the four levels of Biblical hermeneutics, the literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical in terms of production and history.

In the broadest sense if Hermeneutics means interpretation, the relationship between the author and the reader is established, it means that an analysis that happens in the mind or the psyche of the reader is responsible for the interpretation. If this is accepted then psychoanalysis also has its reflection in hermeneutics. Freud, the epoch making name in psychoanalysis equates interpretation of dreams to assigning meaning to it. This meaning is earmarked based on the understanding that precedes this assigning of meaning. The language and the context become indispensable in interpretation. Jacques Lacan, French psychoanalyst has extended the implications of hermeneutics in his

deliberations of the unconscious and its relation to language. For Lacan, language can never be literal but can only be symbolic

Given the polysemic nature of language, to understand the definite message intended by the author, context in which any literary work was written and the intentional correlation among the various factors that make the text become the determinants of meaning. As Thiselton observes in his *Hermeneutics - An Introduction*, “Hermeneutics explores the conditions and criteria that operate to try to ensure responsible, valid, fruitful, or appropriate interpretation” (I4).

Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation is concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions, most importantly texts. As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts and other meaningful material. Hermeneutics looks back at a long tradition as the set of problems it addresses have been prevalent in human life, and have repeatedly and consistently called for consideration; interpretation is a ubiquitous activity, unfolding whenever humans aspire to grasp whatever they deem significant.

As Hermeneutics is an interpretation of human behaviour there is an attempt to understand human behaviour. The stories talk about people who are in the process of finding themselves. This understanding and finding themselves begins the quest. There is an underlying behaviour in the seekers. This behaviour is being analysed with the help of the analytical tool termed as the Hermeneutic loop. First a question is raised; there arises the need for the meaning of an event. The event is a part of life. This event creates a need for freedom. It is projected through action or speech. This leads on to the Engagement

with the phenomenon called Life in which there are many parts. This engagement with parts elicits feedback which challenges our understanding of the whole. This challenge in turn triggers reflection, reinterpretation and a greater understanding. This Understanding is the Whole of Life. Finally the congruence between the parts and the whole is arrived at.

Hermeneutic Circle was first proposed by Friedrich Ast the German philosopher and philologist as he drew attention to the interpretation of a text in a circular motion. Friedrich Schleiermacher also adopted the notion that any text is understood in reference to its different mechanisms and the whole. So the text is looked upon in terms of part-whole relationship where meanings are elicited from the play between the parts. So a relationship is being figured out as the meaning and the relevance of each part becomes indisputably drawn from the other parts. So hermeneutic circle is an experiential occurrence which points towards an understanding. Since no literary text can give one theological meaning the analysis cannot be purely objective. This is why hermeneutics is ontological. It is in opposition to the vertical picture of knowledge of epistemological foundationalism with its structure on conventional beliefs. In this vertical system new beliefs are always justified on the basis of existing beliefs leading down to foundational beliefs. Hermeneutics emphasises the circularity of understanding, the hermeneutic circle.

Each of the stories of Coelho is the story of a journey. It is the journey of the hero to understand life and move further in the path of his calling. This journey fills the pot holes that one can face. The journey is like that of Bunyan's pilgrim's journey. The cross that he shoulders is that of responsibility towards life and towards the higher calling. It tests his resilience to go beyond the horizon. The different stages of this journey is best understood with the help of the hermeneutic loop. Hermeneutic loop is the pattern with

which text or message is understood. The author gives specific messages to be understood. This understanding cannot escape from being subjective as the reader's response is integral to the meaning of the text. But the authorial point of view and the author's intention can be justified with the hermeneutic loop. The whole can be understood only in parts. And the integration of the parts will lead to a comprehension of the whole which in turn will throw new insights to the world created by the author. It becomes an interpretative whole. The one thread of the loop begins with the Understanding- the whole of life. As the reader enters into the world of the story he has an understanding of the whole. The characters about whom the story is, also have an understanding of their life. These are the two indices where the reader and the author meet.

This understanding leads to or raises questions on the need for the meaning of what has taken place. And on the side of the story and the character, the need to understand the events leads him further in his life, his quest or his search. The next loop is the need for freedom to do and act accordingly. On the part of the reader it leads to construe the action and thoughts. This further leads to engagement, when the actual act or thought takes place leading further to the feedback or the understanding of the result of the actions and thoughts which encounters the earlier understanding. A call for reinterpretation and greater understanding now becomes a necessity. Every thought and action is now seen in a new light, ushering a complete understanding of the text by the reader and a complete understanding of life by the character.

Understanding with regard to the Whole of life raises the question of the need for the meaning of an event of the past. This need for freedom is projected through action or speech. This is the engagement with the phenomena which make it a part of life. The engagement

with parts elicits feedback, which challenges the understanding of the whole. This challenge triggers reflection, reinterpretation and greater understanding which becomes the understanding of the Whole of life.

The Alchemist (TA) is the story of a shepherd boy in search of hidden treasure. This search takes him to places and meets people. He finds himself in situations which become explorations of the soul. He travels. He wants to know where the hidden treasure lies. As a shepherd he was happy. He knew how to rear his sheep. He felt the sheep understood him. “So there were times when he read parts of his books that made an impression on him” (Coelho, TA 4). There used to be a meaningful conversation between them. He even told him about his first love. He spoke about the daughter of the wool merchant whom he had seen the previous year. “He recognised that he was feeling something he had never experienced before: the desire to live in one place forever. With the girl with raven hair, his days would never be the same again” (Coelho, TA 6). His parents wanted him to become a priest. But his passion to know the world rather than knowing God or about people’s sins was more intense. His father seemed to have acknowledged his son’s wish. ““Amongst us, the only ones who travel are the shepherds`. “Well, then I’ll be a shepherd” (Coelho, TA 9). Life had been as he had wished, going to places and meeting all sorts of people. But later he had a recurring dream. “He had had the same dream that night as a week ago, and once again he had awakened before it ended” (Coelho, TA 3). The dream takes the shepherd to the second loop in the hermeneutic circle. The dream necessitates interpretation for the only reason that it is recurring. “It’s the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting, he thought” (Coelho, TA 11). In his dream was a child playing with his sheep but did not like it. He felt protective for the

sheep. But he also felt the child would do no harm to the sheep and the sheep also did not feel disturbed by the child. “I don’t know how animals know the age of human beings” (Coelho, *TA* 13.) The child held his hands and took to the Egyptian pyramids and said “If you come here you will find a hidden treasure” (Coelho, *TA* 14). He should know the meaning of the dream. He met the next person in life who will bring a change in his life, the old woman in Tarifa who interpreted dreams. Psychology and neuroscience define dreams simply as a mental activity. According to Freud, dreams represent unconscious desires, thoughts and motivations. To Santiago his dream becomes a motivation to search for the hidden treasure. In the process his other wish is also fulfilled, his dream to travel and explore the world. Since the dreams are very personal, generalised interpretation will not serve the purpose. That is what the old woman who is supposed to be the interpreter of dreams says. “And dreams are the language of God. When he speaks in our language I can interpret what he has said. But if he speaks in the language of the soul, it is only you who can understand” (Coelho, *TA* 13). The dream of calling him to a far off place is another manifestation of his desire to explore the world. “The world is huge and inexhaustible” (Coelho, *TA* 11). But not knowing anything about the pyramids, though it was disappointing, he had to go. Life sometimes does not give any choices. To be alive is to walk in the path that unfolds before. Paulo Coelho reiterates this in his interview with Oprah Winfrey for Oprah Winfrey Network “You are here to honour the miracle of life.” (qtd. in Winfrey) So he decides to move further on.

Santiago chose to be free. He had travelled quite a bit and he knew that every new day proved to be a lesson. He chose to be a shepherd because he did not want to confine himself to a seminary seeing the same people and doing the same work even if it is to

serve God. “When someone sees the same people every day, as had happened with him at the seminary, they wind up becoming a part of that person’s life. And then they want the person to change. If someone isn’t what others want them to be, the others become angry. Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own” (Coelho, *TA* 16). Here the third part of the loop, the need for freedom that is projected through action or speech begins to take shape. Santiago has to move forward in his life.

Destiny has it that Santiago has to meet a person who will show him the need to follow certain practices which show the meaning of life. After having settled for the day, with his new book and wine, his sheep safe in his friend’s stable, he meets an old man. The old man called himself the King of Salem, Melchizedek. Melchizedek is considered to be the prototype of the Messiah and the King of Righteousness and Peace. It follows that Santiago’s meeting with the King will lead him on to his finding the treasure and the meaning of the treasure itself. He makes Santiago understand the need for going out into the world. Treasure becomes metaphoric. For the question as to why a King would be talking to a shepherd, the King answers, “For several reasons. But let’s say the most important thing is that you have succeeded in discovering your destiny” (Coelho, *TA* 2). It also prepared him for the difficulties he would face in his search and to make him deserve the treasure. Coelho’s conviction on religion is evident here. The old man also gives him Urim and Thummim, a white and a black stone. These will help him in making decisions. He proceeds further after paying the price of six sheep to the old man for his advice. He loses his money at Tangiers, the place in Africa from where he has to make his way to the Pyramids. He is placed in a metaphoric freedom. He does not own

anything. He was free to pursue whatever he wanted. He is not confined to or pinned down by anything earthly or materialistic. So he feels “I am like everyone else-I see the world in terms of what I would like to see happen, not what actually does” (Coelho, *TA* 42). He was again reminded of what the old man had said. “And when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it” (Coelho, *TA* 23).

He should not even be dependent on the two stones. God will show the path, but only the individuals should walk in it. It is the freedom to do what each one deems fit according to the situations in which one finds himself in. His association with the crystal merchant, building of the business for the merchant are all Santiago’s need to reach the destination. His meeting with the English man, the Alchemist and Fatima, the girl of the desert prove to be life changing. And when he does find the treasure under the same sycamore tree, the treasure of love of the world, and love for the world he understands the true purpose.

All the while Santiago had been engaging himself with different aspects of life. Beginning from the dream, his liking for the merchant’s daughter which takes him to the city, the meeting with the Melchizedek, the King of Salem, his reliance on Urim and Thummim, the loss of money, the apprenticeship with the crystal merchant, the journey to the pyramids, the meeting of the English man, the alchemist and his love for Fatima, the battle he witnesses between the tribes, climbing the sand dunes in the desert and finally finding the treasure under the sycamore tree, all these are experiences towards understanding life.

Santiago’s life seemed to be normal. He had become a shepherd instead of becoming a priest. He wanted to travel and as a shepherd he did so. He thought his life would be full, visiting places and meeting people but he felt incomplete. He had an urge

to meet the merchant's daughter and hoped that in the pretext of shearing and selling wool he could talk to her as she was eager to listen to his stories. But wanderlust would not let a person be satisfied. His passion for travel definitely was beyond the simple winning of the merchant's daughter. His life cannot be confined to just seeing places. This is the next loop. He has to understand that there is a deeper calling and that was his dream of finding a treasure. From what the old woman who interprets the dreams demands, one tenth of the treasure, the treasure would be gold as the traditional meaning of treasure would hold. He meets the King of Salem, Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is the King of Righteousness too who wanted six sheep before he went to find the treasure. So the treasure becomes definite. But is the dream so simple as such it means only the material treasure? Or can the presence of the King of Righteousness be taken for granted. Both have a purpose, this is the challenge of interpretation. The King gives two stones, a white and a black one. Does the King encourage chance to play in life? Rather it is a way to make Santiago realise that he has to find the way for the treasure. The two stones, which are omens, can be relied upon. But the individuals yearning to find an answer, or a solution or a way cannot depend on any other external force, rather put the heart and the soul in the search. "...that at a certain point in our lives we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie" (Coelho, *TA* 18) and the King also says, the most quoted verse of Coelho, "And when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (*TA* 23).

Santiago reaches Tangiers and loses all the money and works with a crystal merchant to earn his way home. The unseen presence of the King of Righteousness

directs him and he is on his way to Egypt. His meeting the Englishman further advances the unravelling of the mystery of the universe. The camel drivers and the caravans seem to understand the language of the desert. "I've seen how the guides read the signs of the desert, and how the soul of the caravan speaks to the soul of the desert" (Coelho, *TA* 83). The Englishman's interest in alchemy persuades Santiago to ponder over the alchemy of life itself. After reading the books on alchemy he says, "I learned that the world has a soul, and that whoever understands that soul can also understand the language of thing... , But above all, I learned that these things are all so simple that they could be written on the surface of an emerald" (Coelho, *TA* 87). His meeting with Fatima, and the love that they experience and finally the alchemist, are not by chance and everything is 'maktub'. They are encounters with reality which will phase out the meaning of the dream and treasure.

From the beginning Santiago faced challenges, not from outside but within himself. His complacent life as a shepherd is awakened by the dream. He starts his journey to decode the mystery of the dream and thus starts his journey of understanding life and the meaning of treasure until he comprehends that the treasure is not the material treasure but the understanding and acceptance of life. When he meets the old woman she says she who can interpret the language of God cannot interpret the language of the soul and he alone can do that. This takes him onwards. His meeting with the King of Salem is the next imperative happening. It is the King who advises him on self-reliance and the reliance of the external force of the universe which guides everything and everyone in this universe.

The Urim and Thummim become the symbols of internal regulatory forces. But they cannot be relied upon absolutely for any achievement. The loss of money and

his apprenticeship with the crystal merchant prepare him for the next stage in life. It is not just as a helper that he stays with the crystal merchant. By helping the merchant build his business he builds his inner dimensions to expect things and prepare himself for the imminent happening. That is why he convinces the merchant to serve tea in crystal wares to attract customers. There is no place nearby which serves tea in crystal ware. As it helps the merchant to expand his business, this also helps him to realise that it is time for him to move further without being in one place. He earns enough money only to buy sheep and come back to his own known place. But his destiny is different. It is imperative that he has to find the treasure in the Egyptian Pyramids. So he meets the chief of the caravan and sets himself along the path of further exploration of himself.

The English man who is in search of the alchemist is another catalyst in his discovery of the world. While the Englishman spoke of the alchemy it is not just transforming metals into gold but transformation of life itself. "That's the principle that governs all things," he said. "In alchemy, it is called the soul of the world" (Coelho, *TA* 82). The oasis gave him yet another glimpse of life, to be present to the present life. The camel driver tells him, "I am interested only in the present. If you can concentrate always on the present, you'll be a happy man. You'll see that there is life in the desert, that there are stars in the heavens, and that tribesmen fight because they are part of the human race. Life will be a party for you, a grand festival, because life is the moment we're living right now" (Coelho, *TA* 89). He meets Fatima, loves her and wants to make her his wife. But that can happen only after the personal legend is realised. She agrees to wait for him and he accepts. The alchemist whom he met after conveys the meaning of treasure and alchemy of the world. "It is about penetrating to the Soul of the World, and discovering the treasure that has been reserved for you"

(Coelho, *TA* 144). He sets about riding into the desert alone, because he has to find his treasure himself. In the desert he followed the omens and began to dig under a stone but found nothing. He was encountered by men who called themselves refugees of the war. They beat him to find money, instead they find gold gifted by the alchemist. And when they leave one comes back to tell him that he had a dream of treasure to be found in Spain and that under a sycamore tree. He found his treasure. His experience is worth more than anything that the alchemist who could turn anything into gold could bargain for. He felt the levanter and with it the scent of Fatima. He would find the joy of life too. “I am coming, Fatima,” he said” (Coelho, *TA* 177).

Santiago understands the meaning of treasure when the refugee told him that he too had a dream twice and in that dream he had to travel to Spain, and under the sycamore tree he will find the treasure. The journey itself becomes metaphoric. The journey is a plunge into the self to decipher and translate the different elements that make up life. Hermeneutics demystifies the meaning presented to the interpreter incognito. In the journey of his search, the old woman who interprets dreams is the identity of a person who looks for some hold in life, to make sure the path he has chosen to walk. The dream of finding a treasure in an unknown place again becomes a symbol. To decipher the symbol and to echo to oneself the path that one is to take an external personality is needed. So he goes to the interpreter and thus his path is set to find the treasure. This excursion into the future is not going to be easy.

The King of Righteousness appears to teach him the significance of the conventional and the commonplace happenings. He gives Santiago Urim and Thummim, the stones to read the omens. They do not stand for the chances but to recognise that life

is always forked and a resolution has to be taken. They help the boy in decision making. The King says, “Always ask objective questions. But, if you can, try to make your own decisions” (Coelho, *TA* 31). He also tells a very momentous story of the boy who was asked to explore the palace without spilling the oil in the spoon which he has to hold while walking. The boy being cautious of the spoon does not look at the marvels of the palace. The next time he engaged himself in wondering at the spectacles of the palace and forgot the oil and the spoon. So the old man advises, “The secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, and never to forget the drops of oil on the spoon” (Coelho, *TA* 34).

When he reaches Egypt, he loses his possession of money, but not the Urim and Thummim. Again they serve their purpose. He understood that he had to stand alone and fight the world. The assignment with the crystal merchant gains him both money and the wisdom to possess the treasure. His trail through the desert began. He met two other people who will be teachers of life. The Englishman and the alchemist. The Englishman is in search of the alchemist. Alchemy, to him, is not just turning metals into gold, but transformation of life. The Englishman is not able to meet the alchemist but Santiago meets him. “He (the alchemist) knew that in the caravan there was a man to whom he was to teach some of the secrets. The omens had told him so” (Coelho, *TA* 91).

His encounters with the wind and the sun teach him the efficacy of love. It is the language of the soul and God talks to the world in the language of love and alchemist also makes him understand how important he is to the world. ‘No matter what he does, every person on earth plays a central role in the history of the world. And normally he doesn’t know it’ (Coelho, *TA* 167). Finally he goes alone into the desert to the pyramids. Each one has to decipher the world alone. The encounter with the refugees is the final lap

in the journey. They find him in the possession of gold. He has to lose this gold also, for anything that happens twice will happen the third time also. He lost his possession twice. He loses the third time only to gain the wisdom of the world. That the treasure is under the sycamore tree precipitated all the experiences that he had had. Finally he looks in the direction of the desert and tells Fatima that he will come to her. Love is also a binding force and without this nothing can be meaningful. So Santiago has the treasure – the alchemy of understanding the world. “The boy was becoming more and more convinced that alchemy could be learned in one’s daily life” (Coelho, *TA* 85). The metals of experiences have to undergo a transformation to become lessons of life. It is the beginner’s luck and ‘maktub’. Santiago has understood the meaning of life, that experience is the teacher and the treasure.

The Pilgrimage (TP) is the first of the momentous works of Coelho before he wrote *The Alchemist*. In this book again it is the search for understanding in the pretext of finding the sword. Coelho introduces the readers to the RAM practices which become vital to comprehend the nature of life and to appreciate its meaning. In this world of today which questions the presence and the nature of God, he shows how vital and imperative is the faith in God. It is not a willing suspension of disbelief but a working certainty that guides us in every instant of the day. This is what makes our life well-intentioned and evocative. Coelho sets for Roads on this journey. The Road to Jerusalem, the road of the Hearts, of the grail. This gives the power to do miracles. The second one is the Road to Rome, the road of the clubs which helps in communicating with the other worlds. Third is the Road of the Spades, the Jacobean road which gives power only when

one is aware of the other roads. The fourth road is the Road of the Diamonds, the secret road which has to be experienced alone with no one's help.

Coelho belongs to the fraternity known as Tradition, a great community which includes cryptic orders from all over the world. The story begins with the ceremony of ordination, when he is to be ordained as the Master of the Order of RAM. But what happens is instead the sword is given to his wife, whom till now he does not know that she belongs to any Order. He is instructed by the Master that he has to travel along the road of Tradition to gain the sword again. He is told by the Master that this road is not the road of the few but everyone's road. He is told mercilessly that the power he thinks he has is of no worth because it is shared by everyone. The sword was refused to him because of his pride and his fascination for doing miracles. He has to understand the power of the miracles and need for it in order that the miracles he performs will be meaningful. He has to acquire that power in order to have the sword. So he has to seek the sword by taking the medieval route to Spain, the Strange Road to Santiago. Thus starts his journey, the pilgrimage.

When Coelho arrived in France to set the journey, in the Road of the Spades which would give him power to earn the sword, he was reluctant and did not seem to have the courage and willingness to walk along this road. This is the medieval route, the strange road to Santiago. It is the route taken by millions of pilgrims to reach the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. He was urged by his wife who has already earned the sword to take up this journey. Understanding should come through various phases and through different experiences. When the sword was denied to him his pride was crushed. So he has to live the life as designed by God in order to deserve the

blessings and be chosen one. Experiences are the lessons of life. These are given as exercises which are taught by the guide Petrus and he becomes the master for Coelho during this pilgrimage. This is a pilgrimage to Coelho because he has to learn with the practice of the exercises by which he gains both physical and spiritual strength to acquire the sword and the knowledge that he would be gaining in the due course. This will make him worthy of the sword that he will gain. “Even if I were not able to find my sword, the pilgrimage along the Road to Santiago was going to help me to find myself” (Coelho, *TP* 14). His meeting with Madame Lourdes in France became significant. He learnt to be humble first. Humility is imperative when one has to gain knowledge. Humility helps one to unlearn whatever has been learnt in order to learn something new. Overconfidence blinds people to so many small but significant things in life and they fail to realise their ignorance. His guide through this journey Petrus explains the “The true path to wisdom can be identified by three things...First, it must involve agape...second it has to have practical application in your life. Otherwise, wisdom becomes useless and deteriorates, like a sword that is never used...And finally, it has to be the path that can be followed by anyone. Like the road you are walking now, the Road to Santiago” (Coelho, *TP* 25).

Though the need to understand becomes necessary it also raises the question as the prerequisite to decipher the meaning of happenings in one's life. So Coelho met Madame Lourdes and Petrus who guided them through this journey. Madame Lourdes told him that he will find a guide who will decide where and when to stop and continue the journey. When Madame Lourdes prayed for his journey, she evoked all the elements of Nature for protection. “The Spirit of the ancient pilgrims of the Tradition must be with you during the journey. The hat will protect you from the sun and from the evil thoughts;

the cape will protect you from the rain and from the evil words; the gourd will protect you from enemies and from evil deeds. May the blessings of God, of San Tiago, and of the Virgin Mary be with you through all your nights and days. Amen” (Coelho, *TP* 18).

As he began his journey he made the first mistake of falling into the hands of the devil. He mistakes the first person whom he meets, a person with the look of a gypsy to be his guide. But he is saved from this grave mistake by the guide Petrus. It has been designed that the guide will take him through the journey. He is freed from the clutches of evil in his excursion through life. In order that the passage will be fruitful, and he will realise the meaning of life and finally win the sword he has to free himself from the grips of all kinds of evil. Failing to recognise the intention of others and trusting blindly is also a mistake that cannot happen. At the right time Petrus appeared and was saved. This devil is a spirit who has power over material things. “Since he is a fallen angel, he is identified with the human race, and he is always ready to make deals and exchange favours” (Coelho, *TP* 22). He has to be unfettered from so many snags like this in order to fulfil his purpose. So Petrus taught him many exercises that would give him the needed wisdom and strength to acquire the sword.

The RAM practices that Petrus teaches helps Coelho to engage himself with the ordinary facts of life. As said by Petrus earlier, the path to wisdom should have practical solicitations in one’s life. Wisdom is to live life to the fullest experiencing all its contours and vagaries. It is its practical implication that gives meaning to anything that is learnt. The first exercise is the seed exercise. To sit in the foetal position and feel that one is like a seed and listen to every sound around, feel its effects and then to relax slowly and come to the original position. Like the seed that breaks open the ground to come out against the

force of gravity, one should also break out from the gravity of everything that binds us to this physical earth in order to open out to the so many beautiful things around us. “The tension increases more and more until it becomes painful, unbearable. When you can no longer stand it, scream and open your eyes” (Coelho, *TP* 27). “The force that had been pressing down on me suddenly ceased. I had broken through the earth and was surrounded by that ‘something up there’” (Coelho, *TP* 26). This exercise gives Coelho the courage to face life. The fetters that bind physical and mental can be broken if one wants to fulfil the promise that one gives to oneself. That is the promise that each one has to keep and there cannot be running away from this obligation. The seed once planted has to grow. No one has the right to make it rot. “Yet today I had been reborn. I had discovered that although the earth and my sleep were full of comfort, life “up there” was much more beautiful. And I could always be reborn, as many times as I wanted, until my arms were long enough to embrace the earth from which I had come” (Coelho, *TP* 29).

Travel itself is an adventure through life and it becomes the greatest teacher. The situations and the people one meets across the journey have something to teach and the lessons of life are learnt.

That’s why a religious pilgrimage has always been one of the more objective ways of achieving insight. The word *peccadillo*, which means a ‘small sin’ comes from *pecus*, which means “defective foot”, a foot that is incapable of walking a road. The way to correct a peccadillo is always to walk forward, adapting oneself to new situations and receiving in return all of those thousands of blessings that life generously offers to those who seek them. (Coelho, *TP* 32)

To refill ourselves with the wonders of life, time should not be a constraint. Petrus taught him the next exercise, the speed exercise. This exercise is to walk as slowly as possible. This helps to observe everything around us. This assists in realising one's objectives by not missing even a simple thing on the road forward. And it also makes one aware that time is in his hands and also the accountability of getting the best out of time. The third exercise is the cruelty exercise. This is to warrant that one does everything out of love. Love is the only obligation. The purpose of our life should not be forgotten and this makes one realise the value of love and the miracles that love can perform. Miracles are very intuitive and subjective. It has meaning only for those who believe in it. But all the same, it does not matter whether people believe in it or not, because love can transform and transmute anything.

The third exercise is the water exercise. It is to channelize intuition. Intuitions are powerful agents of finding a solution. It will "create a new code for communicating with the world. It was the soul's secret code- the language that we know but so seldom hear" (Coelho, *TP* 86-7). The next is the Blue sphere exercise. It is the ritual of Agape. Agape is the highest and the purest form of love, It manifests itself in many forms and enthusiasm is one. To feel good and to accept compliments and praises is to acknowledge the power within us. This spreads like the blue sphere that envelops the universe. This exercise is to be aware of being alive and the immense blessings that are received. "This is the manifestation of the great love that goes beyond the day to day struggle; it reinforces and invigorates, as it provides energy and peace" (Coelho, *TP* 110). The Buried Alive exercise gives the experience of death and shows how death is a force of motivation and a companion. Death becomes another manifestation of agape. It shows who we are and will not let us

free from life's battles. It really saves one from the sin of regret. The Breathing exercise shows how to draw energy from around us. When Petrus ordered Coelho to climb the cliff of the waterfall it was a near death experience. But the pilgrim had to do it because he alone has to understand what is in store for him. Life has to be lived by oneself and each one has to win his victory. This breathing exercise helped Coelho to climb the cliff. The Shadow Exercise demonstrates how to arrive at the correct solution amidst so many wrong ones. The Listening exercise helps to perform what we think to be the most difficult of the tasks. It teaches us to listen to the voices within us and affirm our strength. "It means having faith in your thoughts" (Coelho, *TP* 178). The final exercise is the dance exercise. "The dance offers an almost-perfect means of communication with the Infinite Intelligence" (Coelho, *TP* 193). It makes one realise that after having won wisdom it has to be taught to others. Only then will wisdom have any meaning at all.

Each of these exercises are to demonstrate different phenomena of life. Constantly Paulo Coelho questions the validity of these exercises and is made to understand the need for it. The sword has to be won. But at what cost and what is the need for the win. It is not a simple material sword made out of metal, but a manifestation of power. This power in order that it will be wielded efficiently and to the good of humanity, he has to pass through several tests to prove his worth. And every time Coelho questions the guide Petrus, Coelho is shown the need for and how to use it. Knowledge cannot be sealed within oneself. Like the sword that is not put to use, rusts in the scabbard, knowledge that is not taught to others is of no avail. This is what he learns in the next two loops of hermeneutics.

“The pilgrimage along the Road to Santiago was going to help me to find myself” (Coelho, *TP* 14). Coelho had struggled all the while to win the sword, completing all the rituals and supposed to have acquired all the wisdom to win and wield the sword. But just at the moment of victory the Master gave the sword to his wife and told him to seek the sword along the Road to Santiago. He was baffled and became aware that he had to begin his quest all over again. He had thought he had mastered all that belonged to the Tradition. But now he stood defenceless. So his journey of acquiring starts from here. He has to understand what the sword meant. Is it power and knowledge as he thought it to be? It is and much more. He should understand that it is not the sword that matters but the path to winning it and more importantly what would he do with it. His master in the Tradition had taught him certain things. He will learn in the course of the pilgrimage the answer to all these reservations.

The Christian tradition in the first millennium considered going on pilgrimage sacred and formulated four routes. One of the four routes is the road to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. He reached Spain and had to meet Mme. Lourdes to get further instructions. As he reached the house and rang the bell but no one turned out. He doubted if he had arrived at the right time or if the person was not willing to meet him. But a little girl appeared and showed that the door was open for him to enter.

“The gate had been open, and I hadn’t even thought to try its handle” (Coelho, *TP* 16). This is his first lesson. All the while he had thought that the meeting with Mme. Lourdes would be just an ordinary occasion. But he learnt that nothing can be taken for granted, everything has a purpose and one should be ready to understand it. In his concern and fervour to travel he lost sight of something very simple but very significant. And when

Mme Lourdes prayed for his pilgrimage, she invoked the elements of Nature to be with him in his journey. Having prayed thus she also said he has to obey the person who will be his guide through the journey. “You must swear total obedience to your guide” (Coelho, *TP* 18).

As he passed the Spanish Gate to the Strange Road to Santiago, he felt the full impact of the journey. Then Coelho had his first encounter with the devil. He took the first person whom he met on the street to be his guide. But, Petrus, the real guide, who was sent by the Master of the Tradition to guide Coelho arrived. Petrus gave the explanation for the devil in the later part of the story, but warns Coelho of such devils in the progression of the excursion. The ancient Christendom believed in miracles. But Coelho did not understand the phenomenon behind these miracles. Miracles were performed to teach ordinary people the efficacy and the importance of faith. That is why Christ performed miracles. And those of his followers were able to accomplish it because they had faith in Christ. And these miracles need not be beyond the natural order of things, which Coelho fails to recognise. That is why he says “But, what my Master performs are not miracles, because they don’t contradict nature” (Coelho, *TP* 24). He has to understand that the path to knowledge is everyone’s path.

Knowledge that cannot be put to use is no knowledge. Petrus explains the true path to wisdom can be identified by three things, it must involve agape, it should have practical application, it should be a path that can be followed by anyone. An awareness of the objective is as important as the path taken to achieve the objective. One should come out of the past in order to move forward towards achievement. Coelho could not win the sword because he did not have enough wisdom to understand the miracles done by his

Master. And now having decided to walk the pilgrimage to win the sword, he could not forget his fear of defeat. “You were the prisoner of the past. You had been defeated before, and you were afraid that it could happen again” (Coelho, *TP* 25). So Petrus teaches the seed exercise. This exercise helps to overcome the fear of the past and reach out to a new life. Having had a rebirth there cannot be any disturbing thoughts about the past. It is a new life focused only on the objective. And at the same one never should lose sight of the happenings around us. “It is very important to pay attention to the road, the road that teaches us the best way to get there, and the road enriches us as we walk its length” (Coelho, *TP* 36). It also makes one aware of Time. “...time isn’t something that always proceeds at the same pace. It is we who determine how quickly time passes” (Coelho, *TP* 38). Unless we take pleasure in what we do, the effort becomes a waste. So Petrus again says, “Try to find pleasure in the speed you are not used to. Changing the way you do routine things allows a new person to grow inside of you. But when all is said and done, you’re the one who must decide how to handle it” (Coelho, *TP* 38).

Petrus introduces Father Jordi, the monk who he meets, as a sorcerer. Coelho understood the real meaning of Christianity and the Second Coming of Christ. The sword is a treasure to Coelho. He has to earn it. And in the process he should understand the purpose of the sword. So this becomes a treasure. And Father Jordi says, “Wherever your treasure is there will be your heart” (Coelho, *TP* 43). He explains that The Second Coming is not a time bound occurrence. It happens within ourselves. In all the activities that we do, if we are able to realise the purpose of the act and its impression on others then it becomes an understanding of the Second Coming. When the purpose is realised then it becomes agape, the complete form of consuming love. It is and there is no debate

on it. Each one has to realise this sort of second coming. And Father Jordi says, “And wherever your heart is, there will be the cradle of the Second Coming of Christ; like these shells, the pilgrim is only an outer layer. When the layer, which is the stratum of life, is broken, life appears, and that life is composed of agape” (Coelho, *TP* 43).

Coelho understands the meaning and the message behind the Second Coming of Christ when Petrus says, “It is always happening. That is the secret of the sword” (*TP* 44). Coelho’s understanding of Catholicism is reaffirmed when he asked Petrus if the search for the sword was related to the understanding of the Christian faith. Faith is the magic in life and of life. Just as the sword when won, cannot be allowed to rust in the scabbard, defeating the very purpose of the journey to win it, Faith, that is based on love cannot also be defeated in the living of life. Every moment of life should be filled with agape and that is the magic. The occult practices that Coelho seems to follow is only a façade to reiterate his firm faith in the all-encompassing love that is the saviour like Christ.

The meaning of such an engrossing love is in the story of Felicia of Aquitaine. She is the essence of love that Christ lived and died for. She divided all her wealth, as the daughter of a Duke, out of abundant love for humanity, among the poor people of the region and also built a church with her own hands as an acknowledgement of the blessings of the Lord and to serve the people. But her father sent her brother to bring her back. As she refused she was stabbed to death in her own church. As retribution would have it, her brother realised his mistake and when asked for forgiveness from the Pope, he was asked to walk to Compostela. When he reached the place where love personified was killed, he stayed on and continued the work of his sister.

And in the following discussion on God, Petrus explains how the retribution works. When the brother was asked to walk to Compostela and when he stayed back in the small church, he had to do that because love cannot be interrupted. God is not vengeance and the person trying to destroy love will have to recreate. That is how the law of Christ works. Petrus says God is everywhere and the speed exercise, by walking as slowly as possible, helps one to realise God in everything. “God is in everything around us. He has to be felt and lived” (Coelho, *TP* 48). The pilgrimage should be a pleasure. Only then the purpose of it can be felt. In the process of pilgrimage, the dream is lost. It becomes just an event. This happens because we let the dream fade away.

Coelho is in the quest for the sword, not only because it was denied to him, but it is his dream to acquire the power, whatever it might be. It cannot be let to fade away. All the lessons that he needs to learn in the process is to keep the dream alive. He questions everything. He is not able to comprehend certain things. And since it is demanded of him that he should obey his master implicitly, he should. But that should not stop him from knowing. He has to fight to get the answer, and that is a good fight. Eventually, it is a battle, only, “shifted from the battlefields to the fields within ourselves” (Coelho, *TP* 50).

Petrus further clarifies so that the seeker in Coelho understands the validity of the implication of the sword. The sword, should it go back to the scabbard, begins by the blame game. The first symptom of making the lustre of the dream dull is to blame time. In the fear of losing the battle, Time is wagered. The second is the assumption of the certainty of things. It is believed that everything is set to happen and there is no place for uncertainties. But life is a grand adventure. Each one has to live his life. Failing to recognise life as a grand adventure, makes it like a Sunday afternoon. There are no

demands. Sluggishness takes the better of things and though there are many ways to achieve the goal the most accustomed way is chosen. And when the battle is lost the blame story begins. In the pursuit of the dreams there cannot be any feeling of guilt, remorse or self-pity or indecision. All these negative feelings when converted to physical pain vanishes and leaves us as a pursuer of dreams. Petrus teaches Coelho the Cruelty exercise. Whenever any kind of negative feeling overtakes, pain is inflicted upon by digging the tipoff the forefinger on the cuticle of the thumb. The intense physical pain will help one come out of the suppressing thoughts and will put the person once again in the path towards fulfilling our dream.

The conversation after the exercise helps Paulo Coelho understand the true meaning of love as Christ stood for. Not only are the dreams killed, they are compromised in the name of love. In the name of love hurt is inflicted upon oneself.

Of all the ways we have found to hurt ourselves, the worst has been through love. We are always suffering because of someone who doesn't love us, or someone who has left us, or someone who won't leave us. If we are alone, it is because no one wants us; if we are married, we transform marriage into a slavery. What a terrible thing (Coelho, *TP* 55).

He adds that had it not been for the crucifixion of Christ people would not have understood the meaning of Christ's presence on earth.

When the Son of God descended to earth, he brought love to us. But since people identified love only with suffering and sacrifice, they felt they had to crucify Jesus. Had they not done so, no one would have believed in the

love that Jesus brought, since people were so used to suffering every day with their own problems. (Coelho, *TP* 56)

Each of us has a personal devil who from time to time tests our tenacity and faith. According to Coelho, in the voice of Petrus, the guide, a personal devil is required to shake us out of monotony and thus leading to the death of the dream. As in *The Alchemist*, Coelho says the whole world conspires to help one realise the dream, here the whole world is the help of everything around us to help us win the good fight. The two spiritual forces that help and guide everyone are the angel and the devil. The angel, each one knows and has been taught to invoke the angel in everything we do. The Devil is also an angel. He manifests himself in material things like gold and power. It becomes necessary to bring this devil under our control. This devil cannot be ignored and for that it is necessary to know what he wants. The vision of the dream should always be in front so that this devil can be kept at bay. Here the devil is invoked in the form of the messenger. Advice can be taken from him but cannot let him dictate the rules of the game, which is life.

Petrus teaches the Blue Sphere exercise to understand Agape. It is love in its purest and at the same time simplest form. Paulo Coelho was able to exorcise the devil in the form of the dog that was haunting the old woman in the village. He was able to do it because he had understood the meaning of the personal devil. He had looked straight into the eyes of the devil and showed his strength which made the devil run away. Petrus explains, “your angel is your armour, and your messenger your sword. Armour protects you under any set of circumstances, but a sword can fall to the ground in the midst of a battle, or it can kill a friend, or be turned against its owner” (Coelho, *TP* 65). Later Coelho understands the significance of Agape when they witness the marriage. So many people had gathered to

witness the marriage of the Duke's daughter and among them he could see older people who had loved their entire lifetime. This is the sort of love that Christ had for the people. "This was the kind of love that Jesus felt for humanity, and it was so great that it shook the stars and changed the course of history. His solitary life enabled him to accomplish things that kings, armies, and empires could not" (Coelho, *TP* 105). It is this love that drew people towards saints and hermits, that they could perform miracles in the lives of people.

Death is also an important aspect of life. The pilgrim should understand the vivacity of death because it is a force of manifestation. It is a companion that none can run away from. Death is also a manifestation of Agape as it shows who we are. It is a force because it does not let one flee from life's battles. Otherwise one will be pushed into the greatest sin of regret. Coelho learns the Death exercise. To imagine death in life makes one aware of the multitude possibilities of life. It takes something in everyone to imagine being buried alive and feel and live through all the formalities of death and burial. In the end it makes one realise the grandeur of life and live it full. Having learnt the death exercise Coelho is able to climb the waterfalls which seemed impossible in the beginning. And he learns breathing exercise to draw energy from everything around. The inhalation and exhalation of air helps in harmonising the self with the outer world.

In order to win the sword, Coelho has to understand the right and the wrong decisions. One is in constant struggle between the right and the wrong decisions. In order to hit upon the right decision one should know what could be the wrong one. The shadow exercise helps in identifying the problems and focusing on the solutions. The exercise is to focus on the shadows of different objects around. Trying to differentiate the shadows helps in analysing the problem to arrive at a solution. It helps in differentiating the right

and the wrong solution. As in the case of Coelho, he is a pilgrim to the shrine in order to get the sword. He has to feel that the sword cannot be in a place that is unholy and it should be in a holy place. He learns to weed out cul-de-sacs and arrive at the right conclusion. There is another lesson that Coelho has to learn before he wins the sword, about the enemy. "Our enemy is part of agape, there to test our grip, our will and our handling of the sword" (Coelho, *TP* 174). The enemy also has a purpose in each one's lives. But for him one cannot learn anything from the battle. One cannot flee from the enemy, else one would be succumbing to him. And in the battle the circumstances that exist are the greatest source of strength because that is when one realises agape. To be present is the forte. And the teacher moves on to teach the listening exercise. "Everything is contained in the sounds - the past, the present and the future. The person who does not know how to listen will never hear the advice that life offers us all the time. And only the person who listens to the sounds of the moment is able to make the right decisions" (Coelho, *TP* 176). The listening exercise is to listen to the various sounds and it will be seen that the sounds are the voices of various people who have affected and who will have an effect on oneself. This in turn will help the person to wield the sword in the best way.

Having come to the end of the journey, the pilgrim should partake in the ecstasy of winning the sword. And it is his obligation to teach the Road to someone. He has to become the Master and teach someone all the lessons that he had learnt. Every moment life teaches a lesson. To acknowledge the lesson is to be aware of the Wisdom of Solomon and the power of Alexander the Great. One too can be as wise and as powerful as these eventful people only when one teaches others and "participate in the adventure as extravagant as this one has been" (Coelho, *TP* 192). Petrus teaches to dance, beginning

with the movement of body parts one by one to sync to the melody of the song that one had heard when he was young. “The dance offers the perfect means of communication with Infinite Intelligence” (Coelho, *TP* 193).

The final moment arrives when Coelho is given the sword after the rituals of the Tradition. He has won the sword and the sword metaphorically is the wisdom that is gained after strenuous lessons of life. The pilgrimage to the shrine on the Road to Santiago is the pilgrimage to acquire knowledge to live life. This Road is one of the roads where knowledge is power. And this is not the only one. There are other roads, The Road to Jerusalem or the road of the Hearts or of the Holy Grail, which empowers with the ability to perform miracles.

The Road to Rome – the Road of the Clubs, which allows one to communicate with the other worlds. The Road of the Diamonds, which is the secret road where there will be no one to help. Among these roads, the Jacobean route chosen by Coelho to find the sword is significant in the present post truth world because it is where one has a guide, a Master. The Master teaches and also allows to partake, share, suffer, and enjoy the life with enthusiasm and feel Agape, the feeling of surprise that comes from the feeling of enthusiasm when love is felt at its entirety, the all-consuming love, the kind of love that Jesus had for humanity, which let him sacrifice himself for the redemption of mankind.

The Zahir (TZ) is yet another story of searching, seeking and understanding the different delineations of life on the firmament of love. Zahir, in the Islamic tradition, is a person or a thing which cannot be avoided, which is there with us throughout and cannot be escaped from. Paulo Coelho narrates the story of himself, seeming to be autobiographical, how he shot himself into fame as a writer and at the same time how he failed to realise the

true meaning of love and life. At the height of his fame, one day he found that his wife was missing. She is a war correspondent. This is followed by all the speculations and the enquiry by the police. She is thought to be kidnapped, detained by the terrorists because she is a war correspondent, and also she left because of the affairs that he has with many women. Coelho knew that none of them was true. She, who made him discover himself as a writer, would not just disappear from his life just like that one day. All these conjectures remain as they are as he continues to become a phenomenon in the literary field, until one day he met Mikhail in the book signing ceremony of his book *A Time to Rend and a Time to Sew*, in Paris.

He was shaken out of his complacency when he became conscious that his wife really was not to be found. The time had come for him to understand the meaning of the event. He who loved his wife so much, ascribes his success as a writer to her but could not understand and accept the fact that she had left him. He had thought he was not like any other ordinary husband. They both respected each other's freedom to do anything so how could anything like this happen, baffled him until he met Mikhail, the young translator. The meeting becomes an encounter because he understands so many things he had taken for granted. And this he learns from Mikhail. As Coelho tries to reason out the missing of his wife from his life, he enters into the fourth of the loop, engagement with the phenomena of life for which he has to understand the meaning and this will be a challenge to his acknowledged sense. He had thought they both were enjoying absolute freedom and each of them respect others views, opinions and outlook towards everything. If so, why did this event happen? He is roused out of his self-righteousness to elicit new

answers and in this endeavour Mikhail helps him. The stories of Coelho and Mikhail meet at this point and will unravel the mystery of the flipside of Coelho's life.

As he starts his writing career after many self-imposed speed breakers, he finds that he was finally able to write pages after pages. He started to write *The Pilgrimage*, the journey to the Shrine of Saint Santiago de Compostela in Spain. He finds that there is meaning in the rituals and the signs and symbols which were meaningful in the yesteryears. "I discovered that many rituals did actually work, but I discovered too, that those who declared themselves to be the masters and holders of the secrets of life, who claimed to know techniques that gave them ability to achieve their desire, had completely lost in touch with the teachings of the ancients"(Coelho, *TZ* 28). and he also understood the world is so large, larger than one imagines it to be and in this, " All you have to do is to pay attention; lessons always arrive when you are ready, and if you can read the signs, you will learn everything you need to know in order to take the next step" (Coelho, *TZ* 29). He is accepted as a great writer. "...I am doing what I always wanted to do; the translation appears, then the second, and success – slowly but slowly surely – takes my work to the four corners of the earth." (Coelho, *TZ* 31). He is introduced to a concept called 'favour bank' by his publisher. It is something like a bond to help others. When one is helped by so many others to achieve his goal, he is bound to help others too. Our personal bank is filled with so many favours from others that our deposit is full. And it becomes our duty to expend from this. This helps build trust which is the one investment that cannot be taken for granted and interest pays off. "My influence grows. I learn to ask for favours and to do the favours others ask of me" (Coelho, *TZ* 35). Life seems to be moving steadily, he becoming a famous writer and his wife becoming a war correspondent.

This became the turning point in his life. The war, the soldiers and the effect of war on them seems to have taught lessons of life which cannot be learnt from anywhere.

She learns these lessons and finds life meaningless unless Coelho's perspective on it changes too. Life changes and she disappears one day. Coelho has to unravel the mystery behind her disappearance.

For Coelho the disappearance of Esther becomes agonizing, not so much for the absence of her presence nearby but the reason. When he loves her so much and she too understands his love there couldn't be any possible reason for her to disappear from his life. He understands that she is his Zahir, something or someone without which one cannot be. "It is someone or something which, once we have come into contact with them or it, gradually occupies our every thought, until we can think of nothing else. This can be considered either a state of holiness or of madness" (Coelho, *TZ* viii). So to find out the reason for her going away from life becomes vital. "We were both old enough to act and face the consequences of our actions: my wife's (or, rather, my ex-wife's) behaviour was completely out of character, and I needed to know why" (Coelho, *TZ* 85). He went to the restaurant where Mikhail held the meeting. In the midst of the dance and the music he was able to sense that something important was happening. This is where everyone can share their views on anything. Mikhail spoke about love. In Kazakhstan, where he comes from, they believed in the Mongolian myth of creation which is the story of the wild dog and the roe deer. The wild is attributed the feminine quality because he uses strategy to pound upon his prey, while the doe is considered masculine with its attributes of speed and an understanding of the earth. The two impossibilities are required for the world to exist and function. "In contradiction, love grows in strength. In confrontation and

transformation, love grows” (Coelho, *TZ* 91). And he ends his speech with this, “Love is an untamed force. When we try to control it, it destroys us. When we try to imprison it, it enslaves us. When we try to understand it, it leaves us feeling lost and confused” (Coelho, *TZ* 92). This is exactly what Coelho’s feeling was. He thought he was hopelessly in love with her and there could be no reason for her to leave him. So there is an enslavement of love. She had asked him to help her when she spoke about becoming a war correspondent. She wanted to go to the actual war field to understand not the war but human relationships. She wanted to understand the meaning of pure love. “We need to find a way of channelling all this, of allowing the energy of this pure absolute love flow through our bodies and spread around us” (Coelho, *TZ* 106). And she had also said, “The only person so far who has helped me understand this is a rather otherworldly interpreter who says he’s had revelations about this energy” (Coelho, *TZ* 106). And that is how Mikhail came into her life. Slowly the answer to the question why she left in spite of loving him unfolds, but he has to go a long way to understand this.

Mikhail takes him to meet the beggars with whom his wife associated herself with. They said it was she who brought them together. They are beggars not in terms of money but it is spiritual begging. Having formed a fraternity, they share the all-pervading love. “Your wife understood that we know exactly what we want from life. Peace! Freedom! ... Not one person here chose slavery and we’re proud of it, even though you and people like you may think we’re just a lot of pathetic freeloaders!” (Coelho, *TZ* 194) Another thing that Coelho comes to know is the little bit of blood stained cloth. All of those who had come into contact with Esther had that bit of cloth. “The cloth is actually green; it looks black because it’s caked with dried blood. A soldier somewhere in the

world asked before he died to remove his shirt, then cut it into pieces and distribute those pieces to anyone capable of understanding the message of his death” (Coelho, *TZ* 220). He did not have the bit of cloth. Neither had she mentioned it to him. When he met with the accident, his doctor and friend, who treated him also had that bit of cloth. If everyone who came into contact with Esther had that bit of cloth, except for him then there should be something missing in him which Esther was able to see or understand in them. He is reminded of the story of the two firemen, one whose face is unclean and the other whose is not. Who would wash the face? In the view of the world, it is the unclean man. But it is the clean man who would because he sees the face of the other and thinks his face would also be like that. So this is how everyone is. He understands that it is his face that needs cleaning. He had been of the view that he had everything, is capable of loving, enjoys popularity, has a considerable bank balance and is active in the favour bank too. But he realised this.

...during the time I spent in the hospital, I came to realise that I was looking for myself in the women I loved. I looked at their lovely faces and saw myself reflected in them. They, on the other hand, looked at me and saw the dirt on my face and, ...they ended up seeing themselves reflected in me and thinking that they were worse than they were. (Coelho, *TZ* 179)

If he had to see her he had to cleanse himself up. “If I was to see her again, my face needed to be as clean as hers. Before I could find her, I must find myself” (Coelho, *TZ* 179). He knew from Mikhail that Esther was living in Kazakhstan and he waited for the right time to meet her as advised by Mikhail. He has to understand life with all its variants.

Life had become monotonous as in the story that he might have written instead of *A Time to Rend and a Time to Sew*. The story of the couple who think they are

absolutely in love with each other. Live the days until they find that such a life is boring and take lovers for themselves. Both are even now comfortable because they know each other's affair. He understood why Esther left him. He had to be born again, leaving the past and looking only towards the future and the means by which this future can be filled only with the life force of Love. To be perfect according to the norms of the society is what everyone is trying to do. He understands that the Zahir is not something or someone who is always with us. But it is the driving force which helps one to live life fully.

For him, to meet Esther, time was not ready just as Mikhail had said. When he understood this, he was able to meet her. She was sure of his coming. She had waited just like Penelope had waited for Ulysses, Beatrice had waited for Dante, Romeo waited for Juliet. Like a desperate wife waiting for the husband to understand and come back.

He had understood that love for people "should manifest itself – free and untrammelled, guiding us with its force and driving us on." (Coelho, *TZ* 337) His life had come full circle. He found his Zahir.

Veronika Decides to Die (VDD) tells the story of an unassuming girl of twenty four, who decides to end her life because she felt life boring. There is nothing interesting happening. She feels she has everything. The secured job has given her everything. Slovenia, the newly formed small republic has everything with the newly gained freedom from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. People knew what they want and the diplomats knew what, when and where to speak to get things done and the Government knew what the people wanted and so there is a sagacity of enough engulfing the atmosphere. But there is a sense of emptiness in her life. The story discusses the existential aspects of life, questions the validity of life that each human lives, whether it is satisfactory to the

individual himself or to the norms of the society. This leads one to question the hegemonic feature of society. Veronika felt a sense of void because nothing ever happens that would give meaning to life. The utmost sense of monotony and a sense of emptiness makes her decide on suicide. She reasons out. The first reason was everything in her life was the same and once her youth was gone, it would be downhill all the way, with old age beginning to leave irreversible marks, the onset of illness, the departure of friends. She would gain nothing by continuing to live; indeed, the likelihood of suffering only increased. The second reason was more philosophical: Veronica read in the newspapers, watched TV, and she was aware of what was going on in the world, and she had no way of putting things right. That gave her a sense of complete powerlessness.

At twenty four if Veronica had to decide to end her life for this very simple reason, then the reason could not be as simple as that. She had had a very comfortable or rather unexciting childhood. Received whatever she wanted, went to school, and learnt painting as a hobby, because her mother told that it cannot be taken as a means to employment. So she accepted a secure job in the local library, moved into a room in a convent run by the Sisters. That was also comfortable because she always can excuse herself from staying late because she cannot go back to the convent late. Veronica understands the meaning of life only when she survives the suicide attempt. Very ironically the method chosen to commit suicide also does not disturb anybody. After much thought on the ways and means, sleeping pills were chosen. She did not want to slash her wrist to save the nuns from cleaning the room, which would also create a problem for the nuns to rent the room because “We may live at the end of the twentieth century, but people still believe in ghosts” (Coelho, *VDD* 3). She could not jump from the top of one of the buildings and

thus saved her parents from identifying the disfigured body and remembering the shattered skull forever. She takes an overdose of sleeping pills. Eventually she should die, but finds herself in a mental asylum, Vilete. The attempt to commit suicide is not the event that has to be questioned or understood, but her escape from death and treated for madness has to be understood. She wakes up to find herself alive and also only a maximum of seven days to live, as the sleeping pills have to take its toll in the form of a heart problem.

Vilete, the psychiatric hospital, one of its kind in Ljubljana which can accommodate any number of patients because there are so many who want to escape from the world or families that have somebody whom they cannot take care of. “Vilete came to symbolise all the worst aspects of capitalism: to be admitted in the hospital, all you needed was money” (Coelho, *VDD* 11). Dr. Igor in charge of the hospital was in the process of researching vitriol, the poison and its effects. Vilete had many patients to experiment with. Veronica meets Zedka, who too was not satisfied with the complacent life that she was living with her husband and children. She started thinking about her past, her lover whom she was not able to marry for so many reasons. Now she started thinking about him and her personal life became a wretch that she was admitted in the hospital. Mari, a famous lawyer knew how ineffectual laws were, suffered from neuro blocks and found herself in the hospital. Eduard, the son of a diplomat, hopelessly wanting to live a life of his own, to be an artist, but he is not allowed. He finds himself in Vilete because he could not accept the conformed norms of the society.

Veronica understood each one found life very extracting and inside the hospital everything is permissible because it is a madman's asylum. Each one is a schizophrenic in his or her own way. They live in a world constructed by them. Zedka continues to be mad

because she can be herself. Mari understood laws are relative. She even questions God's stand in punishing Adam and Eve for eating the forbidden fruit. According to her no one has clear views on the fundamentals of law. Eduard became a schizophrenic as he could not accept what his parents wanted from him. To become a diplomat like his father. But each of them found their stay in Villette much better than outside. Zedka because of the insulin shots she gets goes on an astral journey. She is able to understand the real meaning of living. Mari, the lawyer found the laws inside Villette more agreeable than the laws outside because inside each one is a law unto himself, but in a harmonious way which the outside world cannot understand and approve. Eduard found love and understanding inside Villette far more convincing and real than the high profile diplomatic life that his parents promised. All the four had to free themselves of that which does not let them enjoy the freedom.

Villette turned out to be the place where this can happen. They are mad because they could not conform to the behaviour that is expected of them from the society. All the three of them experienced too much stress and their cortisol level increased so that their behaviour became abnormal. Veronika decides to end her life because she did not find anything worthwhile in life. But in Villette they experienced a sense of freedom because none can question or find a meaning to what the mad men think and do. Zedka with her astral journey was able to free herself from the shackles of meaninglessness "Anyone who lives in their own world is mad. Like schizophrenics, psychopaths, maniacs. I mean people who are different from others" (Coelho, *VDD* 30). She quotes Einstein, Columbus, the Beatles, and Edmund Hillary, who did not walk on the beaten path and courted criticism. But it is they who proved to be trend setters for others to follow. They showed

something different to the world that the world is now proud of. Their configuration of the world was different. But they had to live like the king of a certain country whose people had gone mad because of the poisonous water of the well from where they drink. The King's efforts to control them go futile because they think the King to be mad. So he also drinks from the well and he thinks and behaves like the people. "The country continued to live in peace, although its inhabitants behaved very differently from those of its neighbours. And the King was able to govern until the end of his days" (Coelho, *VDD* 31). In spite of having escaped the suicide attempt, the doctor gives Veronica only a week to live, because of the heavy dose of sleeping pills. Now when she saw the world inside Villette she wanted to live. There are Mari and Zedka, who are happy inside the asylum because they have learnt how to live. Eduard who has visions of Paradise could not paint those visions to give a manifestation to the world outside. But when he met Veronika he felt that those visions can be apprehended. He started loving her. He quietly submits himself to the injections of vitriol.

Veronika decides she will live. She plays the piano and the music is from her soul and she is able to fill the place with the music that it affects everyone. When she is made fun of she slaps the person, which she would not have done earlier. Now she feels no regrets. She understands physical love when she experiences it by herself. She is not ashamed of it because it has helped her to understand that part of her being. As Mari said "There are only two prohibitions, one according to man's law, and the other according to God's... There is always someone who wants exactly what you want" (Coelho, *VDD* 123). She plays the piano for the sake of Eduard. She felt, "as if by miracle, all the songs she had known returned to her memory, and she played in order to give Eduard as much pleasure as she

herself had experienced” (Coelho, *VDD* 124). Veronica had learnt certain relatable things inside Villeté. Zedka, Mari and Eduard had fought for their lives. Their illness was nonconformity. But they also understood they could not go on like this. In Villeté they found the meaning, like the King in the story. All one needs to do is to accept the situation and be who they are. The doctor comes to this conclusion.

It is if you force yourself to be the same as everyone else it causes neuroses, psychoses and paranoia. It's a distortion of nature, it goes against God's laws, for in all the world's woods and forests, He did not create a single leaf the same as another. But you think it's mad to be different and why you chose to live in Villeté, because everyone is different here, and so you appear to be the same as everyone else. (Coelho, *VDD* 154)

Veronica decides to go out of Villeté even if she had only a few days left to live. Eduard had found his visions of paradise shaping themselves in his love towards Veronica. Paradise is what each one creates for himself when he is in absolute communion with God, Universe. This he found in the music that Veronica played. The doctor discovered that the only cure for Vitriol is to create an awareness not only of life but also of death. When Veronica was given only a few days to live she looked at other people's lives. Just no two leaves are similar, no two lives can be the same. But each one has to carve one's own life and find his own meaning. All four go out. Zedka, to Bosnia, where she will help to rehabilitate people, to be of use to others and find a meaning through altruism. Mari is not going to be a lawyer. She will rather sell flowers and live a simple life without the complications of any law. Eduard and Veronica leave Villeté and enjoy the day. Suddenly Veronica realises that the seven days that the doctor had given her to live was over and she is alive. She does not rake her brains to

find the reason, instead she simply lives. “She would consider each day a miracle, which indeed it is, when you consider the number of unexpected things that could happen in each second of our fragile existences” (Coelho, *VDD* 191).

The Devil and Miss Prym (TDMP) is the story of moral integrity when people come face to face with temptations. It can also be considered as the story of the universal dilemma of the good over the evil, and which will win? The question takes one further to understand the personal and the social responsibility. In the author’s note Coelho talks of a Persian legend about the coming of good and the bad into this world. The Good and Bad was conceived by the same God. Despite God’s wish that Good should be born first in order that he will prevent confusion, bad overtook good. Thus came the good and bad into this world. But God in order to resolve the issue brings in the human race to side with Good to strengthen it. However later another story about the division emerged. But this time God made humans an instrument of Evil. Thus since the beginning of the human race, the problem of good against evil persists. It is this polarisation that becomes the germ of many issues that the humans confront. ‘It is clear from its very inception the human race has been condemned to exist within the eternal division, always moving between those two opposing poles. So here we are, afflicted by the same doubts as our ancestors’ (Coelho, *TDMP* xii).

Viscos is a small nonchalant village where people live an unassuming life. With limited inhabitants everyone knew everyone. This is one of the villages which had thrived in spite of the exodus of the people towards better pastures. The people of Viscos knew that this generation was the last of the one which would live as farmers and shepherds. But it has kept a pact with the ancestors who lived there and taught them to fight till the end. But the problem that Viscos faces is not whether the village will survive the onslaught of technology

and its lure, but will the people of this simple village fight the Devil, the personal devil. The devil entered the village accompanied by the stranger. The Devil became the personal devil in the guise of Chantal, the girl through whom the devil will try his tricks. Berta, the old widow, sees the devil convoyed by the stranger entering the village. She seems to have a premonition that something will happen to Viscos. After her husband's death, her place became the porch of her house which is the vantage point from where she will not miss anything that happens in the otherwise sluggish village.

The beautiful village of Viscos is shaken out of its complacency when the stranger arrives. The stranger comes to Viscos to test the fundamental proposition of the universe, if man is inherently good or bad. He had been an honest and God fearing man, living a contented life in spite of being an arms manufacturer. It was his business and he was a shrewd businessman. He had a loving family, a wife who loved him and two lovely daughters. But that one phone call from someone changed his life. His family was kidnapped by the terrorists and the deal was exchange of arms. As a conscientious person, he called the police and that was the end of his family. He was a person who took the struggles of life as it came and had understood them as part of life. He was not a coward to escape from the adversities of life because he was a regular church goer. "I feared God and respected His commandments" (Coelho, *TDMP* 63). He felt that he did not deserve this tragedy. He now needed an explanation for this tragedy. He had believed that both good and evil existed in the world. But why had God chosen him to be the instrument of that good and evil.

He lost his faith and compassion towards his fellow beings. To him every human being now has become instruments of good and evil. But he could not

understand the rationale behind this. He wanted to find out the answer to the eternal question, is man inherently good or bad? In the struggle between good and bad will not good prevail over bad at least for a fraction of a second? Though a weapon manufacturer, he was just a businessman. Weapons are not bad. But how they are used is what determines the quality.

He picked up a stone from the ground. ‘Here’s the first of them, generously donated by Mother Nature to those who had to confront prehistoric animals. A stone like this doubtless saved the life of a man, and that man, after countless generations, led to you and me being born. If he hadn’t had that stone, the murderous carnivore would have devoured him, and hundreds of millions of people would not have been born’.

(Coelho, *TDMP* 69)

He chose this small village with only 281 inhabitants because all of them lived a god fearing and a satisfied life, or at least they were afraid to go against any law and thus invite the attention of the world. The unassuming people could easily be pitted against each other for a reward. And they could easily be traded for gold. So they became the research lab to test the goodness and evil that is inherent in Man. “Your village has what I did not have: it has the possibility to choose” (Coelho, *TDMP* 69). He told Chantal that he has seen both heaven and hell, been rich and poor, good and evil. He said he is “the person most fitted to reply to my own question about the essence of humanity” (Coelho, *TDMP* 14). Chantal works in the local restaurant and bar. She waits for a change to happen but at the same time cannot accept it because of fear. She is waiting for a chance to go out of Viscos and find a better life. Chantal becomes the instrument with which the stranger will

test the proposition. His engagement with Chantal will be his engagement with the good and evil. With his trap being the gold, which becomes the symbol of richness in every aspect of life, he will test if humanity is insulated against the power of greed or the cardinal sins together. He stays in the only hotel of Viscos, and studies the people befriends them and finds that they are vulnerable. The Mayor wanted to be considered as the best statesman whose only concern was the wellbeing of the people of Viscos and to make the small town conspicuous in the atlas of the world by making it a tourist destination. The priest thought that he alone was responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the people. He thinks of himself to be the alter ego of Christ himself and owns the responsibility of saving the people of Viscos from any spiritual calamity. This is the stage on which the stranger looks at the actors of Viscos and the eventual result is awaited. He said to Chantal, "I am a man who walks on earth with a devil at his side; in order to drive him away or to accept him once and for all, I need to know the answers to certain questions" (Coelho, *TDMP* 71).

When the devil started working, the good and the evil seemed to be equally poised. Are the villagers inherently good that they will understand the bait or will they succumb? The deliberations begin. When Chantal explains the preposition of the stranger to the villagers she recounts the story of Ahab who in a way revolutionised the way of life of the people. Ahab, the outlaw who became the great lawmaker of Viscos, transformed Viscos for what it is. He had erected the gallows in the place of the Cross, and did not mention anything about when or how it would be used. With his authority he convinced people of being good by delivering a series of laws which would make Viscos a good place to live. The gallows instilled fear and the people never transgressed. After some years the gallows were replaced by the cross itself because the fear of the gallows

had made people abide by the laws. “Ahab really understood human nature: it isn’t the desire to abide by the law that makes everyone behave as society requires, but the fear of punishment. Each one of us carries a gallows inside us” (Coelho, *TDMP* 77). Chantal has the inherent goodness. He warns him that after all the devil is a cheater and he might be cheated. “These men and women are used to working hard, to earning every penny with the sweat of their brow; they would never even admit the possibility of gold just falling from heaven like that” (Coelho, *TDMP* 81). She counters the stranger that he has come all the way to Viscos only to lose the wager. He too believes in the innate goodness of man. The test is to prove that it is so. “You still believe that man can be good. If that weren’t the case, you wouldn’t have invented this nonsense to convince yourself otherwise” (Coelho, *TDMP* 81). The situation is a challenge to the stranger as well as Chantal. “She was betting on the fact that people were basically good, despite all the Evil in the world... she too wanted to know the answer.” (Coelho, *TDMP* 81) To him the Chinese offered a convincing explanation for the devils, the personal experience of evil urges man to pass on that to others resulting in an eternal cycle of vengeance.

The village now talked about the stranger and the gold. Chantal was afraid if her faith in man notwithstanding the malevolence that she has experienced, herself not an exception, would be defeated. The Mayor and the priest met to decide the future action. A meeting was called for and the priest took the responsibility of talking to the people about this tricky affair. He felt he was more privileged to talk about the issue of good and evil. In life there comes a situation when one has to accept the wager with the devil. That is what God did with regard to Job. The devil challenged God to see if Job would still remain His faithful servant in the face of all the troubles that he had to bear. Job realised

his fault, the sin of pride that he was committing in believing that he was a good man. God had to accept the wager with the devil in order to save the soul of His servant, Job. So the message was taken by the people and were convinced of the need to commit the sin of murder in order to save Viscos. The Priest, the Mayor, and the people are equally responsible in this issue because the outcome of the act will affect each one of them. Each convinces themselves that what they do is right. Having decided to execute the act, who will be the lamb for slaughter? The first choice of the people of Viscos was Chantal. Then it was decided upon Berta, the only person in the village who did not have anybody and sat on the porch of her house conversing with her dead husband. The wife of the Mayor and of the Priest went to chat with Berta, when the modalities of sacrificing Berta for the good of Viscos were carried out.

A terrible battle is being fought between the good and the evil. This is played through the characters. Chantal, the orphan girl, who the people of Viscos think, lives out of their goodness, wants the gold to start a new life. She wanted to escape the confines of Viscos, a village that will never grow because the children of the village have already gone out seeking new lives leaving behind their old parents to talk and die in the same old way. The arrival of the stranger and the gold he entices with leaving the moral aspect was something she could not resist. The Mayor always prided over the fact that he was the best administrator and it is his responsibility to keep Viscos from any sort of disaster and economically sound. The priest had been an ardent soul who from his heart had realised the meaning of serving God as serving humanity. He shepherded his flock so well that his fame reached the Bishop of his region. The Bishop was so impressed by his honesty and earnestness that he transferred the priest to Viscos. The priest understood it

was out of envy, but he had the chance to transform the little village into a truly Christian village where everyone would serve humanity and thereby serve God. But in his ten years in Viscos he was not successful in bringing the people to the Church. But now with the Chantal coming with the news of the stranger and the purpose of his visit to the village, he found for once his church overflowing. They needed a Judas to understand Christ, “so that the scriptures would be fulfilled...” (Coelho, *TDMP* 150). So, the

Evil needs to manifest itself, for them to understand the value of God. Just as the traitor in the Bible, soon after betraying Jesus, understood what he had done, so the people in the village would realise what they had done and be so overwhelmed by remorse that their only refuge would be the Church. And Viscos – after all these years- would once again become a Christian village (Coelho, *TDMP* 151).

In the fight between the Good and the Evil it was the fear of doing evil that was more powerful than the evil itself. Chantal had understood it was the fear alone that was preventing the people of Viscos from committing the murder. “They were all dreaming of a next chance to commit a murder – only dreaming,...,because they would never actually do anything...they would congratulate themselves every morning on keeping their integrity, and blame themselves each night for that missed opportunity” (Coelho, *TDMP* 110).

But in order that the Good will manifest, evil has to happen. So as decided, Berta would be the scapegoat. The reason is, “She’s the only person in the village who does nothing of note” (Coelho, *TDMP* 138) is quite satisfactory to all. So are they going to sacrifice Berta for the sake of the good of the village or for the greed for gold disguised behind the ‘good’ intention? The wife of the Mayor and the wife of the priest surprised

Berta with their visit and she knew what was going on. The next day the priest himself visited and she said she had suddenly become an important person in Viscos because unusually she is being visited. She understood the reason for the visit and she quietly accepted. The priest gave her some pills and she drank them with water. The priest said she will wake up to see her husband in heaven. The strife between the good and the evil cannot come to an end so soon. The formalities of sacrificing Berta for the good of Viscos were well drawn and the inhabitants met at the village square. Each one in Viscos should own the responsibility of the act, so each one will fire a shot. And that was the decided modality of killing Berta. For once, people thought, they were all together forgetting their differences and giving up their ego. But when Chantal saw the crowd, her personal angel that was hiding behind the person devil took the better of her. She cried to the crowd to listen to her sending waves of shock to everybody. She argued that the gold of the stranger is like the gold of King Midas that will never let them do anything. They would only be inviting the attention and the scrutiny of the whole world. So she would stand aside. She did not want to be a part of the crime thereby would be on the receiving end. Whether she was able to convince the whole crowd or not, but she had her followers. Many stood aside. And the weekend was different. The stranger did not need Chantal to explain everything. The Good and the Evil struggled in each one. Good does not need evil for its manifestation. It is only to be understood that God manifests Himself in ways which are inscrutable.

By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept (BRP) is the story of two childhood friends and their transformation due to love when they grow up. Both brought up in a staunch Spanish Catholic tradition, their view of life transmutes once they discover their

love for each other. Pilar had been a timid, matter of fact girl. From the small town of Soria, she moved to Zaragoza to study and work. Her life had been confined to these small towns and a narrow vision of life. She had been communicating to her friend and his letters revealed that he had been travelling wide and the letters became less frequent. But one day she is invited to join him in Madrid. This meeting becomes the turn-off point. She meets her childhood friend who has now become a fascinating spiritual leader with the power of healing. His deep spiritual calling took all over the globe. He was now convinced of the feminine quality of God and was deeply involved in it and wanted the world to acknowledge it. He tries to spread and prove the power of the Immaculate Conception which he found to be present in all the religions of the world. Pilar receives a letter from him asking her to come to Madrid, Spain. She hears him lecture to an exhilarating crowd. One woman from the crowd told her that he was giving back what the humankind had lost – the religion. His lecture Pilar heard is about the power of miracles. The radiance of the miracles is lost to reason in our involvement in everyday mundane activities. “Pitiful are people who must realize this. Because when they are finally able to believe in miracles, their life’s magic moments will have already passed by them by ” (Coelho, *BRP* 9). She tried to reason out why she had consented to his invitation but to no avail. She could not let this visit be a waste, she would rather go back to Zaragoza. But again he wanted her to be with him and invited to go with him to a conference that he was to attend. It was not a love shared by two children. When she had loved him as a child, which was “it was another life, a life whose innocence had opened my heart to all that was good” (Coelho, *BRP* 23). But now she knew what she wanted. He had grown up from the innocent love to a mature one which understands the trials of love and life. “Then he

turned to me. It's a very simple sentence, he said. I love you" (Coelho, *BRP* 26).

She accepted the invitation to go to Madrid with him and life seemed to be so beautiful and she did enjoy life. She was seeing the real world not through television or newspapers" (Coelho, *BRP* 31). A woman from the crowd spoke about him doing miracles. She did not understand what that woman meant but later on that would be a turning point in her life. She had to understand the significance of performing miracles and they are a phenomena which only the faithful can discern its meaning and cogency. Her parents had initiated her into Catholic faith. But she has to know what faith and spiritual support means. A belief in miracles becomes life supporting particularly if the prospects of life seem to be beyond redemption. She needs to understand this.

Pilar now goes into protective mode. She feels she cannot allow love to overtake her. "I was sure I could never fall in love with someone like him. I knew him too well, all his weaknesses and fears. I just couldn't admire him as others seemed to" (Coelho, *BRP* 36). But she has to understand him and fall in love with him and help him in his ordained journey of life. She has to let the crack open in the dam. "But love is much like a dam: if you allow a tiny crack to form through which only a trickle of water can pass, that trickle will quickly bring down the whole structure, and soon no one will be able to control the force of the current" (Coelho, *BRP* 36). She witnessed him encounter an old man who pleaded with him to go over. "Please! Said the man. "I heard you were in the city. I need your help. It's my son" (Coelho, *BRP* 38). He left with the old man. Later on he told her that he would show her a house "that she might be interested in" (Coelho, *BRP* 40). She did not know the relevance or the significance of this because still she was confused as to what he was heading to? They drove towards the village in France across the Pyrenees.

She saw a chapel and wanted to go in but was not allowed by the old man who seemed to be keeping watch over the chapel. As she was about to return, he took her inside. She could not apprehend his action. She took enough time for an imaginary Ave Maria and while leaving she heard an important lesson of life, not to be a part of failure and be a victim. The act of going inside the chapel broke the chain of this frustrated participation in a losing game. Life has to be won through living not by anything that will deplete one of the energy to do things. Finally he said she is worth the fight that he was fighting - for her love. She still was careful not to let the dam crack. He narrated the story of the 'other', the other person in us all who always advises us to be cautious and to do things that will make us richer and so be happy- happiness in terms of the riches. But one has to listen to the heart rather than to this 'other' voice. But there will be defeats and sufferings. "But it is better to lose some of the battles in the struggle for your dreams than to be defeated without ever knowing what you're fighting for" (BRP 56). Once the 'other' is ousted out of life the Divine energy starts flowing to perform miracles. Outside the rented room, over a bottle of wine during the chat he spoke of his faith in The Virgin Mary.

Pilar thought he had not come out of the Catholicism of his childhood. According to him, "She is the feminine face of God. She has her own divinity" (Coelho, BRP 66). She understood his well-founded understanding and the ensuing faith in the female version of God. She started listening to her heart rather than the 'other' which was keeping her indecisive. He told her the story of Bernadette, the little girl who saw The Virgin and raised a fountain in the middle of the plaza and it started curing people's illness. He said he was the disciple of The Virgin Mary and he had seen Her. He spoke to her of his spiritual experiences, of going round the globe, learning the lessons that

different faiths of the world taught each in its own way the beliefs and convictions in the Great Mother, the female form of God. He also spoke about the miracles which are phenomenal because either they are not understood or not believed. He explained the apostles who performed miracles were ordinary folks, “The apostles were fishermen, illiterate and ignorant. But they accepted the flame that fell from the heavens. They were not ashamed of their ignorance; they had Faith in the Holy Spirit. This gift is there for anyone who will accept it. One has only to believe, accept and be willing to make mistakes” (Coelho, *BRP* 93). Since he loved her and wanted her, “all the universe conspires to help” (Coelho, *TA* 23) the dam that Pilar kept a close watch on without letting any crack to form now cracked. She had also learned to keep the ‘other’ at a distance and let love fill her heart. “ I closed my eyes and let the music flow through me, cleansing my soul of all fear and sin and reminding me that I am always better than I think and stronger than I believe” (Coelho, *BRP* 95). Like the Virgin Mary who had said in spite of all the pain that she had to suffer, “Thy will be done” (Coelho, *BRP* 96) she said the same, and “my soul was serene, and my heart at peace” (Coelho, *BRP* 98). After many years since she had given up her faith she prayed, “God, I am trying to recover my faith. Please don’t abandon me in the middle of this adventure, I prayed pushing my fears aside” (Coelho, *BRP* 99).

Pilar enters into the next phase of her journey. She has understood the reason why he was in the seminary and what his position is now. He said he learnt whatever he could in the seminary. But he felt that was not all. He had pleaded with God to transform his love towards her to love for all people. But when he went along with his superior to take an inventory of a house in Saint- Savin, where an old woman, a believer, was living and after her death left the house to the Church, he felt everything changed. He imagined

himself living with her and their children. When he spoke about this to his superior, he advised either to go back to the world or be back to the seminary, “But you have to be committed to the place you choose. A divided kingdom cannot defend itself. A divided person cannot face life in a dignified way” (Coelho, *BRP* 104). Her involvement in the feast of the Immaculate Conception and her meeting the Charismatics intensified her love for him. She felt there was no going back. She felt she was transported “to a time when God had felt closer to me and had helped me” (Coelho, *BRP* 111). She also understood his conviction towards Our Lady, his desire to serve Her by serving humanity. What she saw around her was not the inert rule-bound Catholicism. But it was a vibrant source of life. She felt jealous of the Virgin, because now the Virgin has completely taken over him. “I could see that his love was greater than I’d thought and spread over places where I’d never set foot” (Coelho, *BRP* 115). But as he had said she cannot let the ‘other’ sway her. She asked for forgiveness. “Forgive me, Our Lady. Forgive me if I’m being selfish or small minded, comparing with you for this man’s love” (Coelho, *BRP* 115). As she became engrossed in the celebrations she began to articulate and cry. She felt and understood the meaning of faith. Tears were not of the weak but they were manifestations of faith and love. She also understood the trials of love and she prayed, “May the Immaculate Conception teach me to love as she loves. May that love grow in me and in the man to whom it is dedicated” (Coelho, *BRP* 119). The challenge to her love began soon after.

When she woke up she could not find him but found a note that said he had gone to the seminary and he would come to take her. She went to the house in Saint-Savin. As she was walking she was met by the Padre. He spoke about his power of performing miracles and he wanted her to take him away from this because of the suffering involved

in it. But because God wants us to be happy, because He is our Father and Mother. The Padre adds, “In order to have a spiritual life, you need not enter a seminary, or fast, or abstain, or take a vow of chastity. All you have to do is have faith and accept God. From then on, each of us becomes a part of His path. We become a vehicle for His miracles” (Coelho, *BRP* 137). She heard of him, healing a man, from his wife. She understood the reason for his going out that night. She witnessed a miracle being performed by the Padre when he prayed for the woman’s husband. As he prayed the fire cracked and the Padre was speaking in a strange language. She understood she was in love with a man who could perform miracles and capable of curing and bringing happiness into the lives of many. Was she doing the right thing in coming into his life? But love won. She said, “But I’m telling you in the presence of all that is sacred to me, that I would not like him to adopt the conventional religious life. I would not like to see him ordained a priest. He can serve God in other ways at your side” (Coelho, *BRP* 144). He spoke about God to her and how faith takes one closer to God and the closer we are to God, the simpler He becomes and His presence is felt more intensely.

Pilar has to establish her love despite her change of attitude towards him and faith and religion. When he said he wanted to speak of love that is shared between a man and a woman she realised he had to break the thoughts that were binding him. She told him to break the glass symbolic of breaking all that was holding both of them to walk in the new path decided by God. A new sense of indulgence overtook both of them. She told him that she is not going back to Zaragoza and he revealed that after much contemplation he had given up his power of healing to Mother Earth herself. This was not what she had expected. When she was found dying of cold in the convent, and when the nun gave her a

paper to write whatever she was feeling, she felt relieved. These are the trials that even The Virgin Mother experienced, when She was chosen by God. “She suffered because of love, but it was a different kind of love... That’s the kind of suffering that you accept as a part of life; a grand sort of suffering” (Coelho, *BRP* 198). Their story became the story of the two young lovers who sacrificed what was precious for them for the sake of the other. She, her beautiful hair to buy him a wristband for his watch, and he, the watch, to buy the barrette for her hair which she no longer had. When he came to her finally their lives had been decided. By the River Piedra they sat and sat and forgave each other and the meaning of the Psalm 137 became clear. “On the banks of the River Babylon, They sat down and wept.” It is about exile but after that there is hope and joy. The psalmist promises not to forget Jerusalem, the chosen land. When she asks finally, “Do you think your gift has returned?” “I don’t know. But the Goddess has always given me a second chance in life. And She is giving me that with you, She will help me find my path again” (Coelho, *BRP* 210).

In all the stories it is seen that the characters are in a pursuit of life that would be significant. Santiago in *The Alchemist* embarks on a journey only to find the treasure, a material treasure. That is why the old woman who can explain dreams asks for one tenth of the treasure. As he furthers on his adventure, his apprenticeship with the crystal merchant is also in terms of money. When he started his crucial journey to the pyramids, his association with the alchemist was first in terms of learning to change metals into gold. This leads him to recognise the alchemy of life itself. In *The Pilgrimage* Paulo Coelho’s journey to find the sword itself is a pointer towards understanding life. Winning the sword again is metaphorical. It is winning over so many uncertainties, lack of

enthusiasm, the zest for life, unseen portends, having complete control over oneself.

In *The Zahir*, Coelho has to be in different situations to gain this understanding. His wife leaving him and the subsequent search becomes imperative. In the search, Mikhail is like an alter ego who checks him and shows him how to understand. *Veronika Decides to Die* stages the learning of life lessons through the different phases that Veronica goes through in the mental asylum, only to learn to be free of any inflexible notions of life and to enjoy every day because she was supposed to die in seven days. She learnt and the readers also learned to respect life and give it its real value. The other characters Mari, Zedka and Eduard are the different phases that she has to go through to finally arrive at this understanding. *The Devil and Miss Prym* is the moral conflict that any one feels. No one is an exception when it comes to moral dilemmas. Having been raised in Catholic faith, Paulo Coelho tries to unravel the encounter between the Good and the Bad that wages in each one of us. Miss Prym is universal and Viscos is any city. She is anybody who lives a nondescript life but wants everything that will make life interesting and money is something that she cannot resist. The arrival of the Devil in the form of the stranger and his bait to test the integrity of the people of Viscos and the different incidents are the different stages to help the readers understand the eternal conflict that is going on in ourselves. The decision of the villagers to sacrifice Berta for the good of the village is again what everyone would do. These incidents help the readers to contemplate real happiness. Such consideration leads to the victory over the devil in us. *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is the story of the power of sublime love that is reflected in the idea behind the Immaculate Conception and vicissitudes that it can bring about in any one's life. Pilar, again like any of Coelho's characters, is an ordinary girl who finds

herself in love with her childhood friend who is reflecting upon being ordained. His gift of divine healing is the gift that all of us have but are unaware of, because one does not believe in the feminine power. Coelho takes the readers into a course of the meaning of Immaculate Conception and the total surrender to the will of God. In all these novels taken for study, the relevance of life, the way life has to be lived if there should be any meaning at all, is dramatized through the incidents which form the different parts of analysis. Finally, just as the characters arrive at a meaning of life, the readers also reach a conclusion about a well meant-lived life.