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An Israeli Soldier

The author of The Alchemist, Paulo Coelho, starts his book by telling us about his personal quest in life and his road to success as a novelist. He then tells us what four obstacles he believes prevent most people from living their dreams. The obstacles he describes are discouragement from our environment, fear of abandoning loved ones, fear of defeat, and the fear of realizing our own dreams. The first part of Coelho’s book tells the story of a very intelligent, philosophical shepherd boy named Santiago. His parents wanted him to be a priest but all Santiago ever wanted was to travel. He made his dream come true by becoming a shepherd boy.

On one of his travels with his flock, he meets a merchant’s daughter and falls in love with her. He decides that the next time he visits her village he will ask for her hand. On his journey to the village, Santiago stops at a city to rest. He decides to visit a fortune teller who might help him understand a strange dream that he has been having about a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. The fortune teller is not too helpful but later on he meets a mysterious, intelligent old man who claims he can help Santiago understand his dream. Santiago is curious to know more but is highly suspicious of the old man, thinking he might be a Gypsy trying to trick him. Through his book, the author shows us that there are different obstacles we must face in life in order to achieve our personal dreams. By telling us his story and Santiago’s, Coelho delivers the message that nothing is easy in life and that we have to work hard and keep on going, even when it seems all hope is lost.

I can relate to Coelho’s introduction and the concept of his book because I too went through certain hardships in life before becoming a student here in the United States. Growing up, I traveled the world with my parents. We lived in different countries and experienced amazing cultures. I went to private schools and was exposed to opportunities one can only dream of. Those experiences made me confident of the opportunities which were in my grasp and put me in a state of illusion, making me believe that I had a secure future among my foreign friends and that I was similar to them.
An Israeli Soldier

The reality was that I was not like the rest of my classmates. I was Israeli. I was born in Israel and with that came heavy responsibility. When Israelis turn eighteen, they must put their lives on hold for three years and serve in the military in order to be counted as respectable citizens in Israeli society. It is mandatory in Israel and everybody serves, but I felt it was not my calling.

When I turned eighteen, I returned to Israel and within three weeks of my arrival, I found myself with head shaved, wearing the olive uniform, ready to join the rest of my Israeli brothers in service. I spent two months in boot camp and about four more months in specialized training before I was ready to be called a soldier. From the jungles and skyscrapers of Singapore and the magical islands of Thailand, I found myself in the olive tree covered, rocky hills of the West Bank, surrounded by Arab villages and the chanting of afternoon prayers bursting from mosque minarets. It was mesmerizing, Biblical scenery. A beautiful land, but deadly too. All I ever wanted was to go to college, meet new friends, and start a career. Instead, I found myself climbing on watchtowers, experiencing sleepless nights sweeping through narrow village alleys, searching for terrorists, constantly on alert with my weapon ready to shoot, and wearing a bulletproof vest in case there were snipers on the village mosque’s minaret.

I had deserted everything that was familiar to me—my friends, my family, and the great opportunities waiting for me overseas. I felt as if I was on a different planet, having to learn everything all over again and adjust to a culture that had become foreign to me so long ago. Putting my life on hold made me feel as if I was losing my momentum. I was sitting in my RPG-protected watchtower, watching my foreign friends going to college. I felt as if I was being held back. I felt as if my dreams were slipping away from me. Being an Israeli soldier in such a difficult and hostile place made me wonder if I would ever survive this experience. I occasionally heard about an unfortunate soldier who fell in battle, got hit by a sniper, or had a patrol car blown up by roadside bombs left by terrorists. I knew that it was mostly a matter of luck and all I could do was think of my parents and hope I would not be the one who made it onto the six o’clock news tonight.

Even when I felt all hope was lost and that my dreams were getting farther and farther from my grasp, I always tried to be optimistic. As a soldier, one learns how to be patient and wait for things, and so did I. I knew that even though I was going through my own personal hell, one day it would all be over and I would be free to continue my life and pursue my dreams.
During my time in the army I began to look at things differently. I developed a different perspective on life, a perspective I never would have adopted if I had not served. I do believe that surviving this obstacle helped me to understand what I want in life. I decided that my calling in life is to help people to adjust to changes and help them to overcome difficulties. My goal is to become a psychologist. Just like Coelho and his character Santiago, I too went through a journey.

Work Cited