



LAW OF ATTRACTION IN PAULO COELHO'S *THE ALCHEMIST*

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Abstract

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* (1988) has sold over 65 million copies (Ignited Minds Journals). It connects with readers around the world who are looking for spiritual meaning and personal change (Ignited Minds Journals). This paper looks at how the novel reflects Law of Attraction ideas. This is a New Thought belief that "positive or negative thoughts bring positive or negative experiences" (Wikipedia). The study follows Santiago's search for his "Personal Legend." It looks at how this journey connects to LOA ideas like manifestation, omens, and the "cosmic conspiracy." The paper draws on Arunachalam's work on self-actualization, Nawaz and Rasheed's work on self-realization, and Psychology Today's critique of manifestation as pseudoscience. Using these sources, it places *The Alchemist* within larger discussions on destiny, intention, and the power of thought. The research shows that the novel inspires millions with its hopeful outlook. At the same time, it reflects metaphysical claims that are controversial and lack real scientific backing.

Keywords

Law of Attraction, The Alchemist, Paulo Coelho, Personal Legend, manifestation, self-actualization, New Thought, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* tells the story of Santiago. He is "a young Andalusian shepherd boy, who search[es] for the fulfillment of his destiny and he learns a few valuable life lessons on the way" (Arunachalam, 2189). The novel was published in 1988. Since then, it has become a huge global success. It even holds "a position in Guinness World Record for being one of the most widely translated books in the contemporary world" (Ignited Minds Journals). Its main message is that people should follow their "Personal Legend," or life purpose. This idea has struck a chord with millions of readers looking for meaning, spiritual growth, and success.

At the core of Santiago's journey is an idea close to the Law of Attraction. This is a New Thought belief that "positive or negative thoughts bring positive or negative experiences into a person's life" (Wikipedia). Rhonda Byrne made this philosophy popular through her 2006 book and film *The Secret*. It claims that "people and their thoughts are made from 'pure energy' and that like energy can attract like energy, thereby allowing people to improve their health, wealth, or personal relationships" (Wikipedia). Coelho expresses this idea through Melchizedek, the King of Salem. He tells Santiago: "And, when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (*The Alchemist* qtd. in Arunachalam, 2190).

This paper looks at how *The Alchemist* reflects Law of Attraction ideas. It examines the philosophical, psychological, and critical sides of this connection. Supporters see the novel as an



inspiring guide to self-realization. Critics, though, call such beliefs "pseudoscience with conclusions based on erroneous, unfounded, and incorrect assumptions" (Psychology Today). By looking at both scholarly views and critical ones, this study gives a fuller picture of how Coelho's story works, both as literature and as a New Thought message.

Literature Review:

The Alchemist and Self-Actualization:

Scholars who study *The Alchemist* often focus on themes of self-discovery and personal change. Arunachalam describes the novel as "based on the theme of heart-searching, the living of one's dream, meaningfulness and spiritual attainment through self-awareness" (2189). Santiago's quest, in Arunachalam's words, is "the existential search for the ultimate meaning and purpose of the existence" (2189). A key part of this reading is Coelho's idea that "one has to find one's personal legend or the very purpose of being" (Arunachalam, 2189).

The Personal Legend works both as a story element and as a philosophical idea. Arunachalam notes that through Santiago's journey, Coelho shows that "the ultimate secret of success in life is love, for it is at the root of personal transformation and collective evolution" (2189). This change goes beyond the surface. "Santiago's journey completely changes his life," as he shifts from wanting material things to seeking spiritual growth (Arunachalam, 2189).

Jungian and Maslowian Frameworks:

Some recent scholarship uses psychology to read Santiago's journey. Paul and Sathiyarajan study the novel through "the theoretical frameworks of Carl Jung's individuation and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emphasizing how the protagonist's experiences can be interpreted as universally relevant to developmental psychology and the process of self-actualization" (MSW Management Journal). They argue that "Coelho used his narrative to depict self-realization as an internal process between the conscious and unconscious mind, rather than a mere project" (MSW Management Journal).

The Jungian lens helps explain Santiago's encounters with symbols and the collective unconscious. Paul and Sathiyarajan write, "The Jungian archetypal framework elucidates Santiago's confrontation with the self, the unconscious, and the collective wisdom of humanity, while Maslow's theory delineates Santiago's gradual fulfillment of his physiological, emotional, and transcendental needs" (MSW Management Journal). This reading treats *The Alchemist* as "a modern myth of personal transformation, asserting that when individual purpose aligns with a higher calling, one can achieve a fulfilling life" (MSW Management Journal).

Self-Realization and Philosophical Traditions:

Nawaz and Rasheed broaden the discussion by placing *The Alchemist* within several traditions of thought. Their paper "explores how the novel embodies the philosophy of self or self-realization, going back and forth between Western philosophy (Socrates, Nietzsche, Sartre), Eastern thought (Vedanta, Buddhism), psychology (Carl Jung's individuation process, Maslow's self-actualization), and Sufi mysticism" (American Journal of Development Studies). This mix of viewpoints shows how "Santiago's journey embodies the existential (existentialist, mystical and psychological) ideas about self-awareness, personal transformation, and destiny" (Nawaz and Rasheed).

This blending of philosophical traditions helps explain why the novel appeals to so many people. Nawaz and Rasheed point out that Coelho's work "promotes intuition, persistence, and spiritual awakening as fundamental values needed to attain one's 'Personal Legend'" (American Journal of Development Studies). Their analysis confirms that "we continue to learn who we are



from our interactions with the world around us and the guided journey of reflection, resulting in a life of integration and purpose" (Nawaz and Rasheed).

Comparative Perspectives: The Alchemist and Siddhartha:

Some studies compare *The Alchemist* with Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, another story about spiritual searching and self-discovery. Suwathiga and Bhuvaneshwari note that "the journey of the two protagonists in the novel *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho and *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse showcases their paths to self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment" (Confluence, 47). But the two journeys differ. "Santiago's quest in *The Alchemist* is driven by his dreams and the search for material treasure," while *Siddhartha*'s path "focuses on self-enlightenment through life lessons and the rejection of external teachings" (Suwathiga and Bhuvaneshwari, 47).

Both novels use dreams as a trigger for change. From a Freudian angle, "Santiago's recurring dream of a treasure hidden in Egypt can be seen through a Freudian lens as a symbol of his repressed desire for a more fulfilling life" (Suwathiga and Bhuvaneshwari, 48). From a Jungian angle, the dream reflects "the call to adventure archetype, as described by Joseph Campbell (1949) in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*" (Suwathiga and Bhuvaneshwari, 48). Comparing the two novels shows that "both novels emphasize the importance of following one's inner voice, embracing personal growth, and understanding the true nature of life's existence" (Suwathiga and Bhuvaneshwari, 48).

Critical Perspectives: Pseudoscience and Magical Thinking:

Even though it's popular, the Law of Attraction gets a lot of criticism from scientists. Psychology Today calls it "pseudoscience with conclusions based on erroneous, unfounded, and incorrect assumptions" (Psychology Today). Critics say "there is no empirical scientific evidence supporting the law of attraction, and it is widely considered to be pseudoscience or religion couched in scientific language" (Wikipedia).

The psychological critique points out several problems. First, it "assumes that one is completely responsible for any goal that is not achieved, no matter how unrealistic" (Psychology Today). This can lead to blaming victims: "If you get breast cancer—100% your fault (not genetics). If you get raped or abused—100% your fault" (Psychology Today). Second, it discourages real action and planning. "The only way to manifest your thoughts into things is to believe and live as if you've already accomplished your goal. LOA guru Esther Hicks said, 'You did not come into this environment to create through action'" (Psychology Today).

On top of that, science shows "there is no direct scientific proof that thoughts alone can manipulate cosmic forces to deliver specific results" (Boreal Times). Physicists and psychologists "label it as pseudoscience, pointing out that it misappropriates concepts from quantum mechanics without rigorous backing" (Boreal Times). The American Psychological Association "has no position statement, practice guideline, or endorsement supporting the law of attraction or manifestation" (MindLift).

Law of Attraction Framings and the Gap in Scholarship:

A lot of research looks at *The Alchemist* through psychology, philosophy, and spirituality. This includes Jungian individuation, Maslow's self-actualization, Sufi mysticism, and comparisons with *Siddhartha*. But few studies look at the novel specifically through the Law of Attraction. Existing work touches on self-realization, manifestation, and destiny, but rarely treats New Thought philosophy as a main lens. This is a notable gap, since Coelho states core Law of Attraction ideas directly in the novel, most clearly in the line: "when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."



Scholars like Arunachalam, Nawaz and Rasheed, and Paul and Sathiyarajan look at personal change, cosmic alignment, and the power of intention, but they don't name the Law of Attraction tradition directly. At the same time, critiques from psychology and science - especially ones that call manifestation "pseudoscience" or "magical thinking" - are mostly missing from literary studies of Coelho's work. This creates a gap between fields: literary scholars praise the novel's hopeful message, while psychologists and philosophers of science question whether its claims actually hold up. Closing this gap means bringing both sides together — recognizing the novel's cultural impact while also facing the shaky nature of its metaphysical claims. This gives a fuller picture of how *The Alchemist* works as literature, philosophy, and popular spirituality all at once.

Theoretical Framework of the Law of Attraction and Its Application in *The Alchemist*: Historical and Philosophical Foundations:

The Law of Attraction grew out of the 19th-century New Thought movement. This was a spiritual and philosophical tradition that focused on the power of thought and the link between mind and matter. Phineas Quimby was an early figure in this movement. He was a mental healer who believed disease started in the mind and could be healed by correct thinking. Prentice Mulford was another early figure. His essays stated that "like attracts like" in the mental and spiritual world (Wikipedia). The idea became widely known through Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937). This book claimed that thoughts could turn into material wealth through focused intention and belief.

The clearest statement of the LOA came from Charles Haanel's *The Master Key System* (1912). It said: "The law of attraction will certainly and unerringly bring to you the conditions, environment, and experiences in life, corresponding with your habitual, characteristic, predominant mental attitude" (Haanel qtd. in Wikipedia). This statement rests on three main ideas. First, thoughts have the power to cause things. Second, the universe works through some kind of energetic resonance. Third, people are responsible for their circumstances because of their mental state.

More recent versions of the LOA, especially Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* (2006), made these ideas popular through simple language and celebrity support. Byrne claimed that "the universe responds to your energy" and that visualizing and believing could bring about desired results in health, relationships, and money (Wikipedia). But this popularity also drew strong criticism. Psychology Today calls the LOA "pseudoscience with conclusions based on erroneous, unfounded, and incorrect assumptions." It adds that "there is no empirical scientific evidence supporting the law of attraction" (Psychology Today). Critics say the philosophy encourages "magical thinking—the attribution of causal power to thoughts in the absence of any physical mechanism or empirical support" (Datafield).

Core Principles of the Law of Attraction:

The LOA framework rests on a few connected ideas. These ideas show up directly in *The Alchemist*.

1. **Thought as Creative Force:** The basic LOA idea is that thoughts are not just passive mental events. They are active forces that shape reality. Wikipedia sums it up as the belief that "people and their thoughts are made from 'pure energy'" that connects with the universe's energy field. This suggests our minds help build our experience, not just observe it.
2. **Like Attracts Like:** The LOA says energetic resonance links thought and outcome. Positive thoughts attract positive experiences. Negative thoughts attract negative ones. Trine, an early LOA writer, said: "The law of attraction works universally on every plane of action, and we



attract whatever we desire or expect" (Trine qtd. in Wikipedia). This means people pull in circumstances that match their main mental and emotional state.

3. **The Universe as Responsive Agent:** LOA philosophy treats the universe as an intelligent being that helps make human desires come true. This turns the universe from a neutral system into a partner in manifestation. The universe "conspires" to fulfill real desires. It gives signs, chances, and guidance to those who align with their goals.
4. **Personal Responsibility and Agency:** One result of the LOA is total personal responsibility. If thoughts create reality, then people are fully responsible for what happens to them. This can feel empowering to some. But it has also been criticized for blaming victims. Psychology Today points out that LOA logic implies: "If you get breast cancer—100% your fault (not genetics). If you get raped or abused, 100% your fault" (Psychology Today).
5. **Faith and Belief as Prerequisites:** The LOA says manifestation needs full belief and no doubt. Doubt or skepticism supposedly blocks manifestation, while faith speeds it up. This creates a closed loop of logic: if something doesn't manifest, it's blamed on weak belief — not on the theory itself.

Application of LOA Principles in *The Alchemist*:

Coelho's novel puts these LOA ideas into action through Santiago's journey. It turns abstract philosophy into story and symbol.

The Universe Conspiring: The clearest LOA statement in *The Alchemist* comes when Melchizedek, the King of Salem, tells Santiago: "And, when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (*The Alchemist* qtd. in Arunachalam 2190). This captures the LOA idea that the universe responds to us. It's not neutral — it actively supports people chasing their real desires. This shows up again and again through events that seem like coincidences. Melchizedek appears right when Santiago starts doubting his dream. The crystal merchant gives him work when he needs money. The Englishman shares alchemy knowledge. Fatima waits patiently, showing that love supports the Personal Legend instead of blocking it.

Personal Legend as Intentional Focus: Santiago's "Personal Legend" works like the LOA's idea of "clear intention." Arunachalam explains that Coelho presents the Personal Legend as "one's destiny or the reason for one's existence" that must be discovered and pursued (2189). The LOA connection is clear: focusing on one goal brings support from the universe. Santiago's recurring dream about treasure near the Egyptian pyramids becomes that focus point. It shapes his thoughts, choices, and actions. Arunachalam notes, "on the way toward realizing his own personal legend, he had learned all he needed to know, and he had experienced everything he might have dreamed of" (*The Alchemist* qtd. in Arunachalam, 2190).

Omens as Universal Guidance: The LOA idea that the universe sends signs shows up in *The Alchemist* through omens. Melchizedek teaches Santiago to read omens as messages: "The world has a visible language and an invisible one; the visible language is for those who can read, and the invisible one is for those who can feel" (*The Alchemist* qtd. in study materials). Santiago learns to read hawks, butterflies, and stones (Urim and Thummim) as guidance. This matches LOA teachings that the universe sends signs to confirm you're on the right path.

Testing and Obstacles: The LOA view accepts that manifestation faces resistance. *The Alchemist* frames this as necessary testing. Santiago learns: "Before a dream is realized, the Soul of the World tests everything that was learnt along the way. It does this not because it is evil, but so that we can, in addition to realizing our dreams, master the lessons we've learned as we've moved



towards that dream" (The Alchemist qtd. in Arunachalam 2193). So obstacles aren't proof the LOA is wrong, they're proof it's working. They confirm the dream matters and prepare a person for success.

Listening to the Heart: The novel treats intuition as key to manifestation. The alchemist tells Santiago: "'Because, wherever your heart is, that is where you'll find your treasure'" (The Alchemist qtd. in Arunachalam 2193). This fits LOA teachings that emotions act as a guide — showing whether you're aligned (positive feelings) or not (negative feelings) with what you really want. Santiago's heart becomes his compass. It leads him by feeling, not logic.

Energy and Transformation: Alchemy itself is the novel's main symbol for LOA ideas. Just as base metals turn into gold through alchemy, people transform their lives through focused intention and inner work. Paul and Sathiyarajan note that "Coelho used his narrative to depict self-realization as an internal process between the conscious and unconscious mind, rather than a mere project" (MSW Management Journal). This alchemical change mirrors the LOA claim that our mental state can transform outer reality through some kind of energy.

Synthesis: Law of Attraction in The Alchemist:

Taken together, scholarly readings and critical analysis show that *The Alchemist* reflects Law of Attraction ideas through its story, symbols, and philosophical statements. A few key passages show this clearly:

- Universe conspiring: "And, when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (The Alchemist qtd. in Arunachalam, 2190).
- Personal Legend: "On the way toward realizing his own personal legend, he had learned all he needed to know, and he had experienced everything he might have dreamed of" (The Alchemist qtd. in Arunachalam, 2190).
- Testing before realization: "Before a dream is realized, the Soul of the World tests everything that was learnt along the way. It does this not because it is evil, but so that we can, in addition to realizing our dreams, master the lessons we've learned as we've moved towards that dream" (The Alchemist qtd. in Arunachalam, 2193).
- Listening to the heart: "'Because, wherever your heart is, that is where you'll find your treasure'" (The Alchemist qtd. in Arunachalam 2193).

These lines carry the main ideas of the Law of Attraction: the universe reacts to what we want, obstacles test how committed we are, and our inner voice (the heart) leads us to our destiny. But critics remind us these claims aren't backed by evidence. They may just promote "magical thinking—the attribution of causal power to thoughts in the absence of any physical mechanism or empirical support" (Datafield).

Critical Tensions: Inspiration Versus Empiricism:

Using LOA ideas to read *The Alchemist* creates tension between those who find it inspiring and those who question it. Literary scholars often praise the novel's uplifting message. Arunachalam concludes that Coelho's work shows "the ultimate secret of success in life is love, for it is at the root of personal transformation and collective evolution" (2189). Nawaz and Rasheed agree that the novel "promotes intuition, persistence and spiritual awakening as fundamental values needed to attain one's 'Personal Legend'" (American Journal of Development Studies).

But scientific and philosophical critics push back. Psychology Today argues that LOA beliefs are "pseudoscience" with no real evidence. The Boreal Times says "there is no direct scientific proof that thoughts alone can manipulate cosmic forces to deliver specific results"



(Boreal Times). The American Psychological Association "has no position statement, practice guideline, or endorsement supporting the law of attraction or manifestation" (MindLift).

These critiques raise a real question: does *The Alchemist* offer meaningful myth, or does it spread harmful magical thinking? Suwathiga and Bhuvaneshwari suggest a middle path. They point out that both *The Alchemist* and *Siddhartha* "emphasize the importance of following one's inner voice, embracing personal growth, and understanding the true nature of life's existence"- without needing anyone to literally believe the metaphysical claims (Confluence, 48).

Limitations and Future Research:

This paper focuses only on the text itself, so it can't say much about how real readers respond to it or its cultural effects. Future research could use surveys, interviews, or field studies to see how readers actually understand and apply the LOA ideas in *The Alchemist*. Other studies could compare LOA themes across more of Coelho's books (*Eleven Minutes*, *The Pilgrimage*, *Brida*) or across other manifestation books (Byrne's *The Secret*, Hicks's *Ask and It Is Given*).

It would also help to look at *The Alchemist* through postcolonial and feminist lenses. Does its universal philosophy ignore cultural differences? Does its focus on individual destiny overlook shared struggles? These are questions worth exploring further.

Conclusion:

The Alchemist stands as a major literary expression of Law of Attraction philosophy. It turns abstract ideas into a story that readers around the world can connect with. This analysis shows that Coelho's novel puts LOA ideas into practice through Santiago's journey, offering both inspiration and philosophical complexity. Science-based critics call LOA pseudoscience, but the novel's lasting popularity shows that manifestation ideas serve real psychological and spiritual needs. To fully understand *The Alchemist*, we need to hold both sides together — its power to inspire and the shaky ground its claims stand on. The novel works as a cultural bridge between literature, philosophy, and popular spirituality in today's manifestation movement.

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