

Journey and Life Purpose in *Aleph* by Paulo Coelho

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ABSTRACT

This research paper entitled “Journey and Life Purpose in *Aleph* by Paulo Coelho” aimed to analyze the kinds of journey presented in the selected novel and the way in which shape the main character’s life purpose. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study employs content analysis approach which is framed with theory from Bodart, Barrineau, and Flamino (2011) to interpret and understand the journey in the selected novel. The findings show that there are two kinds of journey presented in the novel, which are literal and metaphorical journey. Through his literal and metaphorical journey, the main character achieves his life purpose of spirituality and self-transcendence. From findings, it can be seen that journey is considered as an essentials process of life to be experienced by people.

Keywords: *Aleph, Paulo Coelho, journey in literature, life meaning, life purpose*

INTRODUCTION

As human being, people tend to quest their meaning of life in the world. The life purpose can be revealed by various ways, for instance journey. Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) state that people experience journey from one place to other places to discover their sense of life. Journey is a mediator for questioning people's existence in the world (Desforges, 2000; McCabe, 2005; Palmer, 2005; as cited in Milde, 2010). They claim that journey becomes influential in the search of life purpose because journey is detached from everyday life into an extraordinary life. Thus, it can be inferred that journey is a dynamic process that affect people in the search of life purpose. Life purpose can be affected by surrounding factors around the people during the journey.

The purpose in life is initiated by journey of one's self because journey is not only searching 'the other' but also on a quest of a sense of life (Wang, 1999). People's experiences are associated with the individual quest for the search of life because experiences may affect a new

thing and change ways of life in the individual.

Moreover, Burrow, Hill, Stanley, and Summer (2014) portray that journey can give people a new experience by encountering with others in order to define the purpose of life. They state "the purpose in life is defined as a self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning and is recognized as an indicator of psychological well-being, physical health, and even longevity" (p. 242). Thus, people have to have a life purpose and an idea of how they have become and where they are going (Taylor, 1989). In addition, life purpose is not about worldly aspirations related to people's present and personal life; however, it is about the purpose of life itself and the relationship with God.

In relation to literature, the theme of life purpose has affected many writers' literary works in these days. The theme of life purpose can be interesting because it can portray the people's effort in struggle their lives to uncover the certain meaning of life. McCarthy (n.d.) delivers that the

journey motive is one of the most widely used elements in American literature. The journey is a powerful symbol often used to represent a character's adventure leading to an epiphany, or some sort of self-realization.

The present study aims to analyze the kinds of journey which are presented in Paulo Coelho's *Aleph* and how the journeys shape the main character's life purpose in the selected novel. The collected data on journey issues in *Aleph* are analyzed and interpreted by using journey issue in literature that proposed by Bodart, Barrineau, and Flamino (2011).

The scopes of this study are limited around identifying the conflicts and/or issues on journey in the depiction of the male character in the novel and the supporting characters and antagonists characters are presented briefly to support the analysis of the central character, not to be included as the focus of attention.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method since it focuses on the description and the interpretation of social phenomena

and lead to how people or groups of people can have different ways of looking at reality (Hancock et al., 2009). They further explain that descriptive qualitative concerns developing explanations and attempts to deepen understanding of how things came to be the way in social world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Meaning and Purpose of Life

The meaning of life provides an important path to achieve life purpose. Meaning is defined as "having a sense of where one fits in the world" (Steger et al., 2008). They claim that people can achieve meaning in life if they understand and accept themselves, understand the world around them, and understand where they fit within the world and the others. It can be said that meaning of life can lead people to their purpose in life.

Meaning is conceptualized as a relatively component of well-being, quality in life purpose, and personal growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Compton et al., 1996). They divide the life meaning into four categories.

First, achievement or work includes being committed to someone's work, believing in the others, trusting others, and being unselfish and helpful. Next, relationships or intimacy expresses a desire for close and mutual relationships. Third, religion or spirituality includes having a personal relationship with God, believing in the afterlife, and contributing to a faith community. Last, self-transcendence or generativity appears to encompass most of the domains in which people strive for a sense of meaning. Furthermore, it also includes contributing to society, leaving a legacy and transcending self-interests. Thus, the meaning of life is its adaptability, which means we are in fact in the adapting process. (Hurt, 2003) It means that meaning of life is closely related to the search of life purpose.

After finding the meaning of life, people tend to search for the purpose of their life. Life purpose is defined as a "self-organizing life aim that organizes and stimulates goals, manages behaviors, and provides a sense of meaning" (Mc Knight &

Kashdan, 2009, p.242) and "is recognized as an indicator of psychological well-being" (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), "physical health" (Kim et al., 2013) and "even longevity" (Hill & Turiano, 2014). Therefore, life purpose is considered as a good component for people to achieve quality in their life. In addition, McKnight et al. (2009, p.242) as cited in Burrow et al. (2014) suggests that the purpose of life is important to develop a balanced and good personality, consistent with capacity, and to become the ideal embodiment of kindness in behaviors towards others. Life purpose is a step towards living a truly conscious life.

According to Burrow et al. (2014), life purpose is thought to contribute to well-being by providing a guiding framework for actualizing life goals within a larger social system. Goal striving should be at the forefront of a positive psychology because quality of life is determined by the contents of consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Goals are essential components of people's experience of their life as a meaningful contribution to the

process of life purpose. Goals become a signal for people to what is valuable, meaningful, and purposeful. Goals are thought to produce well-being by serving as important sources of meaning.

Johnson (1999) claims that purpose in life answers the unfulfilled longings that people have to communicate the things about the world. That is why he divides goals in life purpose in one category, which is people must live with God. People created a relationship with God and that relationship guides to fulfill the purposes of God. Through that relation, it also will synchronize the relation with people. Johnson further explains when describing the work to others, people emerge satisfaction and appropriate pride because they have a sense of God's hand reaching back to lead into His will. People will feel their contribution is respected and appreciated in order to be linked with God's purposes and therefore important and worthy of respect.

It is supported by Emmons (1999) who states that spirituality is rated as more important and it requires more effort, because it is

concerned with ultimate purpose, ethics, commitment to a higher power, and seeking the divine in daily experience. He further explains that "meaning of spirituality is the recognition of a transcendent, meta-empirical dimension of reality and the desire to establish a relationship with that reality". People are created in God's image for relationship with Him, thus, to achieve the purpose in life, spirituality is one of goals that should be achieved by people as human being.

However, Dolezal (2012) covers the life purpose into two points. First, the fundamentals of living with passion which means involve things such as managing body, mental, energy, and practicing self-observation. It is related to Emmons (1999) who proposes personal striving as a goal in life purpose. Personal striving emphasizes the human motivation and potentials in the implementation of life meaning. Second, shaping core values that can guide people through life. People may have their own way to survive in life; either it will be fast and smooth or the opposite. It means

that core values differ from person to person. Probably, people value some of the same things as other people, but it will not in the same order and amount. Some examples of the core values include freedom, security, connection, family, honesty, peace, and power. In other words, people generally agree with some people that something are important, people have tendency to be different than others.

From these categories, it can be concluded that people spend significant activities in their daily lives, reflecting, deciding and pursuing personally important and meaningful goals that lend order and structure to these lives. Emmons (1999) mentions life will lack of structure and purpose without goals. Therefore, the findings on goal content and well-being indicate that when it comes to the positive life, not all goals are created equally (Ryan et al., 1996). Goals are the concretized expression of future orientation and life purpose, and provide a convenient and power for examining elements of a positive life.

In addition, Hill and Turiano (2014) state that the search for life

purpose and life meaning is an activity that is distinctly human and it shows how the human brain works. Moreover, having a purpose in life has been cited consistently as an indicator of healthy aging for several reasons, including its potential for reducing mortality risk. Realizing purpose in life is a mean to eradicate the sense of emptiness and mess in life, thereby investing inner peace and satisfaction in life.

Kinds of Journey

Journey is used to represent a mental or physical challenge, often discouragement that the character in question must undertake as a part of their enlightenment integral to their character development (Mc Carthy, n.d.). Journey is a powerful symbol often used to represent a character's adventure leading to enlightenment or self-realization. Moreover, Howard (2010) states that journey have purpose which is a process of discovery in which people learn essential truth about themselves, their society, and the nature of human existence. It can be said that journey portrayed in literature may feature

episodes in which the character undergoes a process to rebirth.

Journey is a twentieth-century phenomenon which has grown significantly in economic and social importance (Theobald, 2005). Journey involves obstacles in the process that can lead people to development and to grow mentally and spiritually. The idea of journey is people have to be striving for somewhere and experience the process before reach the final destination (Harrison, 2009). He also states that a person can create personalities and differences in society through journey. The differences in an individual can make a dynamic world because journey pushes people forward from his or her history.

Journey is considered as a sacred traveling for people to undergo high and low conditions to experience "flow". Flow is "a feeling of being truly autonomous and truly connected with the world" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 191). People who experience journey represent this feeling of "flow" to achieve the purpose.

Brown and Friederwitzer (2012) claim that journey theme in literature is widely popular throughout history that is found in classic and mainstream works of literature and often appeals to the reader on the level of humanity, personal growth, and overcoming unimaginable odds. The protagonist of the story is described as a person of great strength, courage, or outstanding abilities who undertakes a journey internally through their mind, body, or spirit.

Journey motive is one of the most widely used elements in American literature (McCarthy, n.d.). In American literature, journey theme is everywhere that makes the character change from innocence to awareness

The portrayal of journey in a narrative is divided into metaphorical or literal (Bodart, Barrineau & Flamino, 2011). They claim that journey can be considered as a character progression from one place or stage to another and the theme was identified to be present when a character embarks on either a

literal/physical quest or a metaphorical journey

Howard (2010) states that the knowledge of the character always important; it is not always pleasant or easy to accept and they also may be forced to face a hard fact about their place in a particular culture or in the world at large. He further explains that at other times, the character gains insight into their proper natures. For instance the character and soul that are unexplored through journey come from many distractions and must be faced. It can be said that the experience of the character in novel can change him or her in some significant way.

Therefore, by the end of the novel or play, the character is a different person from what he or she was at the beginning. People have story, past, and journey pushing them forward, without these, people would not have unique stories, unique journey (Harisson, 2009).

In relation to this study, the main character experiences the movement from one place to other places. He tends to experience these journeys in order to find the life

purpose. It is caused by the main character will create a new personality in order to achieve his life purpose in literal and metaphorical journeys. Thus, journey can shape the life purpose of the main character.

RESEARCH METHOD

Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study employs the content analysis approach which is framed with theories from Bodart, Barrineau, and Flamino (2011) in order to answer the research questions which are “What kinds of journey are presented in *Aleph* by Paulo Coelho?” and “How does the journey shape the main character’s life purpose in *Aleph* by Paulo Coelho?”. Content analysis of the novel focuses on the description and interpretation which leads people to have different ways of looking at reality (Hancock et al., 2007).

Content analysis deals with the essential method to decide which textual evidence in the novel can be used to answer the research questions. Therefore, this method is a suitable method where the content of the message shapes to draw conclusions

about the content. It is caused by the consideration of content analysis as a method of observation instead of asking people to respond the question. This study has the following six steps that proposed by Prasad (2008). These steps are chosen because this study based on the research questions. Next the communication content in Aleph novel that relates to the second step which is selection of communication content and sample. Also, the content categories developed for this research on what kinds of journey and what kinds of meaning of life in Aleph.

In Aleph, the frequency of the types of journey can be counted to reveal the meaning in order to answer the research questions. Therefore, the next steps are finalizing the units of analysis, preparing a coding schedule, and analyzing the collected data. These steps can be applied to a sentence or a paragraph in Aleph to be a unit and the number of unit in the same category that will be divided by the total number of the unit code to investigate the result. In addition, the findings can be presented in the form of tables.

This research looks for the meaning from the presence of certain words, terms, phrases, paragraphs or certain concepts within the bodies of text. This research also has a relation with literal and metaphorical journeys, and the definition of literal and metaphorical journeys from the previous study and journals are used as a tool to interpret the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Way Literal Journey Shapes the Meaning of Life

The main character experiences literal journey in his travel to Trans-Siberian Railway. His travel is caused by crisis of faith of the main character. This problem makes him feel distressed leading to his conflict and frustration. Therefore, he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway to find his life purpose and experiences some journeys in his travel.

The first type of journey is literal (Bodart, Barrineau & Flamino, 2011). They describe journey as people's movement in physical place. This journey causes the main character to meet several people in Aleph which can create his life

purpose in before and after he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway.

Mostly, the main character experiences literal journey before and after he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway. Literal journey involves the main character's experience to reach his meaning of life. Literal journey causes the main character to meet other characters and leads him to understand meaning of life.

As stated by Bodart, Barrineu and Flamino (2011), before the main character travels to Trans-Siberian Railway, mostly he experiences literal journey and after the main character travels to Trans-Siberian Railway, mostly he experiences metaphorical journey. These journeys shape the main character's meaning of life, which helps the main character to achieve his life purpose in Aleph.

According to Ryff and Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996), other characters may help the main character in achieving this meaning of life of the four categories. However in this study, the main character only achieves three of them from his literal journey before he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway; they are

achievement or work, self-transcendence or generativity and religion or spirituality.

As stated by Ryff & Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996), the meaning of life is a life component of well-being and quality in life purpose. The main character achieves the meaning of life before his traveling to Trans-Siberian Railway since he experiences literal journey. Literal journey helps the main character in finding his meaning of life because this journey makes him meet with others. The main character meets with other characters such as Master J. and Samil who help him achieving his meaning of life.

Master J. as his teacher helps him to find the meaning of life through his lesson about commitment in work. This lesson leads the main character's meaning of life about achievement or work. It is related to Ryff & Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996) who argue that meaning of life about achievement or work can be marked by people's commitment to someone and being helpful to other God's creatures. Thus, this meaning of life is affected by other character

which is Master J. since he experiences literal journey.

The main character also achieves the meaning of life about self-transcendence or generativity since he symbolizes oak tree with life. He finds this symbolism by himself. As stated by Ryff & Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996), self-transcendence appears to encompass people's striving for a sense of meaning in life. Again he achieves meaning of life because he experiences literal journey. Mostly, the main character finds the meaning of life about religion or spirituality. There are two evidence in the novel that signify how the main character achieves his meaning of life. The first evidence shows that Master J. tells about his life journey since he was young, searching his spirituality until he reached his current stage. Master J. teaches the main character about how life is and how to overcome life problem. He suggests that everything should be back to God. It can be said that spirituality is achieved by this lesson as he experiences literal journey.

The second evidence shows how Samil contributes in finding the main character's meaning of life. Samil gives a lesson from his religion which is Islam by providing the evidence from Arabic proverbs. The most famous Arabic proverbs: "The light falls only on the stranger". It means that Allah guide you wherever you go and whatever you do. As stated by Ryff & Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996), the meaning of life about religion or spirituality includes having a good relationship with God and contributing to a faith community.

Based on these evidences, it can be concluded that the main character achieves the meaning of life about spirituality through his literal journey.

The Way Metaphorical Journey Shapes the Meaning of Life

The main character experiences metaphorical journey in before and after his travel to Trans-Siberian Railway since he contemplates the meaning of life by himself. This journey can also be considered as a character progression from one stage

to another that can change people's life.

This journey shapes the main character's meaning of life, which includes achievement or work, relationship or intimacy, religion or spirituality and self-transcendence or generativity. In addition, the main character's meaning of life leads him to achieve his life purpose in the end of his travel to Trans-Siberian Railway.

The main character explains about Aleph to Hilal. Aleph should be found because when someone finds his Aleph, they will be more confident and energetic. Therefore, the main character tells Aleph to Hilal because she feels doubt about her life. The main character gives advice to Hilal through explanation about Aleph. His explanation can be considered as being unselfish and helpful in someone's life. As stated by Ryff & Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996), the meaning of life is categorized about achievement or work when people are being helpful and believing in others. Thus, the main character achieves his meaning of life about achievement or work

since he helps others to solve the problem.

Besides those meaning of life, the main character also achieves meaning of life about relationship or intimacy. He has love affair with Hilal in his traveling. Hilal feels guilty about this affair, and then the main character explains that they are in Aleph. In this case, Aleph also is defined as two people who meet. Alternatively Aleph is called as destiny. Therefore, the main character understands about love between a man and a woman that signifies his understanding about relationship or intimacy.

Moreover, he explains about the meaning of his wife to Hilal. How the main character and his wife face problem in their marriage are described the main character as a person who understands about commitment. It is related to meaning of life about relationship or intimacy. Relationship or intimacy expresses a desire for mutual and close relationship among couple (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Compton et al., 1996). Thus, the main character finds his meaning of life about relationship or

intimacy since he understands about love and destiny and commitment in marriage.

The main character also achieves the meaning of life about religion and spirituality. As discussed above before the travels to Trans-Siberian Railway, he only gets this meaning of life not as much as meaning of self-transcendence. However, he explains about path of peace in world and people must live with God. It is caused by the afterlife and people should live in God's hand. As stated by Ryff& Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996), spirituality can be achieved by believing in the afterlife. It can be concluded that these evidence mark the main character achieves the meaning of life about religion or spirituality.

Mostly, the meaning of life that is achieved by the main character after he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway is self-transcendence or generativity. It can be seen that the main character concerns about his future. He cares about his legacy, so that he will explain the life lesson that he gets to them later. Moreover, he also finds his direction in life about

what he wants to go and do after his contemplating the metaphorical journey. Thus, he achieves the meaning of life about self-transcendence or generativity.

Thus, the main character experiences metaphorical journey after he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway. From this journey, the main character achieves the meaning of life about self-transcendence or generativity.

The Meaning of Life Leads the Purpose of Life

After the meaning of life is achieved by the main character, this leads to find life purpose. Life purpose is defined as a process in organizing life that stimulates life goals, behaviors, and provides a sense of life meaning (Mc Knight & Kashdan, 2009). This becomes important in the meaning of character's life because it can lead him in having goals in their life. Goals in life affect a positive personality because it can make the main character valuable, meaningful and purposeful. It can be proven by the evidence in findings that the main character achieves life purpose in the

end. He finds what he wants to do and where he wants to go in his life, which is the main character's life purpose.

Johnson (1999) argues that the life purpose of people is only one, which is living with God. It is related to Ryff & Keyes (1995) and Compton et al. (1996) who categorize people who have relationship with God into religion and spirituality. It is related to this study, the main character achieves his meaning of life about religion or spirituality from his literal journey.

In this study, the main character also reaches his meaning of life through metaphorical journey. He achieves meaning of life about self-transcendence or generativity. Self-transcendence or generativity appears to encompass people in striving sense of meaning, leaving a legacy and transcending self-interests. As stated by Dolezal (2012), life purpose is categorized into two points which are the fundamental of living with passion includes managing body, mental, energy and practicing self-observation and constructing core values that will guide people survive. The main character's self-

transcendence is related to his fundamental of living and guide him to survive. Moreover, he also has passion in managing his self in the end of the story. It can be concluded that the main character finds his life purpose since he travels to Trans-Siberian Railway.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to see what kinds of journeys which are presented in Aleph novel and how the journeys shape the main character's life purpose in Aleph novel. The findings show that there are two journeys that are presented in Aleph novel; they are literal and metaphorical journeys. Both literal and metaphorical journeys affect the main character's life purpose. The main character achieves his meaning of life about religion from his literal meaning and self-transcendence from his metaphorical journey. The meaning of life of the main character also leads him to find his life purpose.

Mostly, the literal journey was experienced by the main character before his travel to Trans-Siberian Railway. This literal journey shapes

the religion or spirituality of the main character. Religion or spirituality helps people to have personal relationship with God, believing in the afterlife and contributing to a faith community. Furthermore, the meaning of life leads the main character's life purpose since it is marked by people who must live with God. Thus, the main character succeeded to find his life purpose.

Meanwhile, the metaphorical journey which was mostly experienced by the main character after his travel to Trans-Siberian Railway shapes his self-transcendence or generativity. Self-transcendence or generativity includes contribution to the society, self-interests and leaving a lesson for legacy. This meaning of life about self-transcendence or generativity triggers the main character to have his life purpose on a belief of leaving his offspring a life lesson in the future. It is rather different from the main character's reason in the beginning of his traveling to Trans-Siberian Railway. At the end, the main character also succeeded to find self-

transcendence as his life purpose after his trip by Trans-Siberian Railway.

As a conclusion, the main character achieves the purpose of life through his literal and metaphorical journeys. Although the results of the life purpose from the journeys are different, both are the life purposes that the main character has achieved through his literal and metaphorical journeys.

There are many suggestions for future direction of study in this area. In conducting this study, there are some difficulties encountered, especially when finding other studies which are related to this issue. This is because there are only several studies that are concerned with Aleph novel. To deal with this, further studies which also talk about life purpose of the main character in the novel are used as the tool to compare this study with others. Those studies can also be used to see how journey affects the life purpose of the main character in the novel. Furthermore, Aleph can also be analyzed by other tools such as post-modernism or realism approach. Those approaches can be used since there are many issues on

the topic that can be found in the novel. Finally, if journey is used again as a tool, another journey proposed by other experts like existentialism of human being can be used so that the study will also reveal other findings which do not relate to the main character.

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