

The Greatest Miracle in the World Study Guide

The Greatest Miracle in the World by Og Mandino

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Plot Summary

The Greatest Miracle in the World is a self-help book based on the true experiences of Og Mandino when he met a ragpicker who changes his life. This ragpicker, Simon Potter, was a kind man who spent his retirement going around helping people to see that they are part of the living dead and guiding them back into the world of the living. Og visited Simon on many occasions, learning a great deal from him until the day he found a package on his desk that had a farewell message on it. Og went to Simon's apartment only to find out that Simon never lived there. *The Greatest Miracle in the World* is a mystical story about the life-changing events in one man's life and the answers to how the reader may too change their own lives.

Og Mandino met Simon Potter one snowy morning while attempting to enter the parking lot near his office building. The gate would not stay up when Og tried to enter, so Simon came over and offered to hold the gate for him. Before Og could thank Simon, he was gone. It was not until spring when Simon was walking his dog that Og met Simon once more. Simon invited Og to his apartment where they shared a glass of sherry. Og discovered that Simon had interesting taste in literature by the books stacked in his apartment. Simon explained that each of those books had been written in some form by the hand of God.

On their next visit, Simon told Og about his life in Germany before the war, the deaths of his wife and only child, and his immigration and subsequent life in Chicago. Og found all this information eerie because it turned out that Simon's life closely resembled the life of the main character in a book Og has written, entitled *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. In this book, Og wrote about a man who wanted to become the greatest salesman in the world and quickly learned that generosity is what made a man a success. This man shared the same job that Simon held in Germany, which was the owner of a large import/export business, the same name of their spouses, and lived in the same town.

Og promised Simon he would allow him to read his book. A few weeks later, Og arranged for Simon to have his book, inscribing it with a touching dedication. Og discovered that he was excited about Simon reading his book and hoped that Simon would find it belonged in his stack of books that were written by the hand of God. Simon found that it did. Og soon had great success with his book and he attributed some of it to his friendship with Simon. Og got the great idea to co-author a book with Simon that would be a self-help type of book based on Simon's self-appointed job as ragpicker of down and out people. Simon told Og about a memorandum he once wrote after doing hours of research through his collection of books that he felt would inspire people to want to help themselves out of their low self-esteem related problems. Simon even suggested that Og might publish this memorandum in his next book, but Simon insisted that Og use the rules listed in this memorandum before publishing it. Og agreed.

Several months go by before either Og or Simon mentions the memorandum again. Simon has a birthday and Og brings him a glass geranium, his favorite flower, and they



plant it out in Simon's window box so he will have a geranium that blooms year round. That night, before leaving, Og asked about the memorandum. Simon assured him he would have it soon. Og left on a promotional tour for his book and when he returned he found a package from Simon that was clearly a goodbye gift. Og rushed out of his office to Simon's apartment and found a strange woman there who knew nothing about Simon and who claimed to have lived there for four years. When Og cannot find Simon anywhere or anyone who knew him, he went back to his office to see what was in the package. Inside he found a goodbye letter and the memorandum from God. Og decided at Christmastime that year that he would write a book about Simon and the memorandum.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

The Greatest Miracle in the World is a self-help book based on the true experiences of Og Mandino when he meets a ragpicker who changes his life. This ragpicker, Simon Potter, was a kind man who spent his retirement going around helping people to see that they are part of the living dead and guides them back into the world of the living. Og visited Simon on many occasions, learning a great deal from him until the day he found a package on his desk that had a farewell message on it. Og went to Simon's apartment only to find out that Simon never lived there. *The Greatest Miracle in the World* is a mystical story about the life-changing events in one man's life and the answers to how the reader may too change their own lives.

The first time Og saw Simon, he was feeding pigeons in the snow. Og had driven into the city, Chicago, from his home in the after-effects of a record-breaking snowstorm to make up for lost time due to a promotional tour he had just completed for his book, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. Og was the president of the magazine, *Success Unlimited*. Og arrived at the parking lot near his building to find Simon feeding pigeons while standing in a large snowdrift. Og drove up to the gate at the parking lot, ignoring the strange man, and put in his key in order to open the gate. However, once the gate opened, it would quickly fall down again. Og tried several more times with the same results. Simon called out to him that he could help him, quoting from the nineteenth century English essayist, Thomas Carlyle. Og asked how and Simon suggested that he could hold up the gate long enough for Og to drive through. Og agreed. After Og drove through, gathered his things, and turned to thank Simon for his kindness, Simon was gone.

This first chapter touches on the theme of friendship, not only introducing the two main characters, but already suggesting the kind of relationship they will experience by the writer's first words, "the first time I saw him" (p. 11). This statement not only suggests that the two men will meet more than once, but it also suggests some nostalgia, some affection that could suggest to the reader that this event described in this first chapter is the beginning of something wonderful, and not just a brief encounter. The description of Simon may raise a few eyebrows for the reader, his standing out in the aftermath of a record snowstorm feeding birds suggests that Simon is somewhat eccentric; preparing the reader for what might be more unusual behavior from Simon later in the book. When Simon disappeared before Og could thank him, again the reader must wonder what was going on with Simon. This also foreshadows events later in the book where Og, too, wondered where Simon had gone.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Og had a hard day later that spring. Og had been feeling pressure from his friends and colleagues to quit his job now that his book had become such a big success. However, Og liked working at the magazine and felt that he could increase its circulation even more than he already had. Og left the office late one night and encountered Simon and his dog in the parking lot. They introduced themselves to one another and Og thanked Simon for his help that snowy morning. Og told Simon that his real name is Augustine, but he liked the shorten form, Og. Og also told Simon that he was a writer. Simon invited Og up to his apartment for a sherry before his long drive home. Og agreed, although it had been his instinct to refuse. Simon took Og to an apartment in a nearby building, apartment number twenty-one. The living room was full of books stacked in neat piles and spilling from bookshelves. Og looked at the books, surprised at the diversity of subjects. When Simon reentered the room, he told Og that he felt each of those books were special because they were all written with the hand of God. Simon suggested that some writers feel as though they are receiving their inspiration from somewhere else and Simon believed that God would communicate with the world through these writers.

Simon gave several examples of how God communicated with the world in the past, through Moses and Ezekiel and many others, suggesting that in every generation God finds a person through whom he can communicate with his people. Simon said that all people are capable of completing a great miracle. When Og asked what miracle, Simon had him first define the word miracle. Og said a miracle was the ability to change a law of nature, such as gravity. Simon picked up a paperweight and dropped it. Og caught it in mid air. Simon said that was a miracle because Og stopped the law of gravity by preventing the paperweight from falling to the floor. Simon then asked Og what the greatest miracle ever performed was. Og said bringing a person back to life from the dead. Simon agreed, saying that most people today are what he called living dead by not living up to their potential and by not finding happiness.

Simon and Og sat to enjoy their sherry. Og asked Simon about his life. Simon told Og he was a ragpicker, a person who picked people off the junk piles of their lives just like ragpickers during the depression picked valuable junk out of the trash. Simon told Og about a man he once met who was miserable because he had to work two jobs to support his family. Simon gave him the encouragement he needed to move south and open a carving business. Simon wore a cross around his neck that this man made. Og asked Simon if perhaps what he did was the same as playing God. Simon argued that God often plays man but no man could play God. A few minutes later Og left, wondering why a man who liked to save people from a living death would be interested in him.

This chapter goes deeper into the characters of both Og and Simon. Simon turned out to be well educated and well read, his apartment full of books that would not be found in



a typical home, claiming each one was written with direct inspiration from God. Instead of finding this odd, Og found it fascinating. Simon also called himself a ragpicker, a term that dates back to the Depression era, and suggested that instead of rescuing valuable junk for money that he instead rescued people who were part of the living dead, a part of a group of people who did not use their potential to the fullest and could not find happiness. Again, Og was not put off by this eccentric discussion, but wondered what Simon wanted with him, a question the reader must also consider as it foreshadows an answer later in the book.

Og, on the other hand, seemed to be a down-to-earth man with a lot of responsibility and the desire to do well with his jobs, including his position at the magazine which was a job he no longer needed for financial comfort. Og was a hard worker, a sensible person, and was clearly not insane or otherwise lacking in common sense. This characterization of the main characters is such an opposing comparison that the reader must again wonder if Og's sanity will become an issue later in the book, foreshadowing such a time. This chapter also shows that Og was open to unusual events, allowing him to find interest in Simon and his philosophies. These same philosophies are also important because Simon and Og will often come back to them in their discussions later in the book. This chapter foreshadows the main theme of the book—knowledge—and its purpose not only in the book but also in Simon and Og's lives.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

A few days later, Simon called down to Og as he was getting out of his car not to forget to bring him a copy of his book. Og promised he would not forget. On the way to his office, Og found himself wondering about Simon, about who he was and why he was in his life. At his office, Og had his secretary get a copy of his book for him and he signed it "to God's finest ragpicker" for Simon. That evening, Og went to Simon's apartment as soon as he left his office. Simon liked the inscription, but wondered why Og felt that he was God's finest ragpicker. Og suggested it was because he must be guided by the hand of God, just like the writers of his collection of books. Og told Simon that he felt a strange thing when with him, a sort of *dyja vu*, which led the discussion to Dr. Karl Menninger and one of his books. Og told Simon that he knew Menninger personally. Simon then told Og that he believed the mind was a unique machine and that man could program his mind simply by thinking a certain thought or in a certain way.

Og then asked Simon about his life. Simon told Og that he lived in Frankfort but had an import/export business whose main office was in Damascus. Og was surprised by this news because the main character of his book had the same business and it was located in the same area. Simon then told Og that his wife was a Jew and that when the war began he was out of town on business. When Simon returned he learned that his wife and son had been arrested. Simon gave over his business to the Nazis, believing that this would return his family to him. However, Simon was jailed. After the war, Simon learned that his family had been killed almost immediately upon arriving at the concentration camps. Simon then immigrated to the United States where he eventually took a job as a janitor for the Chicago school system. Simon had since retired. Then Simon told Og how he had become a ragpicker. Simon said he had seen a young girl struggling with the gate at the parking lot and he had helped her with it. Simon said this incident had given his life new meaning. Og asked then what Simon's wife's name was. Og said Lisha. Og revealed that the main character in his book, Hafid, was also married to a woman named Lisha.

This chapter delves deeper into the background of these characters, especially Simon. Simon was in Germany during the war and lost both his wife and son. Simon then moved to the United States and managed to find some happiness in a job working around children and then in his retirement as he began to help strangers. Simon found that helping people gave his life meaning. It is this role that makes Simon important to the book. Simon wanted to help people and he has sought out Og. What will Og's role be? Will Og be someone Simon will help or will Og be someone who will take on a role of ragpicker alongside Simon? These questions foreshadow the rest of the book. The discussion at the beginning of the chapter about the power of the mind is also important because it also foreshadows the theme of this book, which is knowledge and its power to help or to harm. Simon suggested that a person could simply think something in order to change his way of thinking. This suggestion is important because it foreshadows the



techniques with which Simon had planned to change the destinies of what he called the living dead. The coincidences in this chapter are also interesting due to the fact that Simon's life so closely resembled that of Hafid, Og's book's hero. This too foreshadows a surprise in the end that has to do with Simon and his true identity.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Og had to go out of town for nearly a month. When he returned, he was in his office late one night when Simon and his dog, Lazarus, let themselves in. Simon looked at the pictures on the wall, suggesting that Og's boss must have been a ragpicker too. Og agreed, remembering how the man helped him when he needed it the most. Then Simon saw pictures of Og with some famous people, and commented on them. Og told him that he knew James Stewart, the actor, and that they had met in the service when they were assigned to the same B-24 group. Simon asked where Og had been and Og explained that he and his publisher had made a lucrative deal for the paperback rights of his book and then he had gone on a promotional tour. Og told Simon how proud his mother would have been because she always believed Og would be a writer one day.

Simon and Og went to Simon's for sherry and began to discuss the coincidences between Og's book and Simon's life. Simon quoted Coleridge, suggesting it was not coincidence but God acting anonymously. Og thought about that and began to think that perhaps he and Simon could write a self-help book together. Self-help books were popular at the time and Simon seemed well versed in ways to help people down on their luck. Og began to ask Simon about all the people he had helped in the past. Simon told him that he had helped one hundred people and he knew the exact number because he had scoured all his books and summarized what he believed God wanted people to know out of them. Then he wrote a memorandum that he called the God memorandum and he had one hundred copies made, giving one copy to each person he helped. Simon felt the memorandum was the perfect format for God to communicate with mankind because it was a format all people could understand. Og suggested that Simon allow him to have the God memorandum so that he could publish it. Simon agreed if Og would promise in return to follow his instructions regarding the memo and use it accordingly himself before showing it to anyone or publishing it. Og agreed. Then Simon told Og that he had put his book with the rest of his hand of God books because he considered it written with the hand of God.

This chapter finally introduces the most important element of the book, the God memorandum. Simon, a self appointed ragpicker of mankind, had written a memo based on everything he learned within the books he owns that he thought were written with help from the hand of God, writing down all the information that he felt God wanted man to know in order to change their lives. This memo is important because it is the basis of this book, a book Og was planning to write while the events in this chapter were taking place in his real world. Simon's memo is the ultimate self help memo, designed and written as though God himself spoke to Simon and told him everything he felt that mankind should know in order to improve their lives and the lives of all people around them. The previous chapters have built up to this moment, preparing the reader through Simon's eccentric behavior, foreshadowing this revelation. Now the foreshadowing begs the question, what will happen now?



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Og and Simon did not discuss the God memorandum the rest of the summer and fall as their friendship began to blossom. Og would go to Simon's often, drinking sherry and listening to him talk. Og looked to Simon as though he were his father and spiritual advisor all in one. Simon spoke of the complacency he felt was becoming the way of life for the world, of the lack of courage of people to take risks. Simon felt most people were afraid of success. Simon felt that people should not stay in a job that made them unhappy. Simon also had little sympathy for people who hid behind disabilities. Simon said no person had a defect that could not be a possible benefit rather than adversity. Simon described what he felt was love, using a story from a Nascar race where one driver went to the aid of another without concern to his own loss within the race. Simon also said that he felt people quit too fast.

Simon's biggest argument was what he called mankind's lack of self-esteem. Simon felt that man no longer believed in himself the way he once had. Simon said that man was better than all else God put on earth, above animals, but that man no longer valued his uniqueness. Simon felt this lack of self-esteem began with Copernicus, a medical man who dabbled in Astronomy as a hobby. Copernicus discovered that Earth was not the center of the universe but one of many balls of dirt and stone moving around a ball of fire. Then Darwin put forth the thesis that man was not created in God's image, but evolved from monkeys. Finally, Professor Edward Dewey began to suggest that man's moods and behaviors could be controlled by the alignment of planets. Simon believed that these things put together made mankind lose his self-esteem because it took away the idea that mankind was unique, created in God's image and made the center of the universe. Simon believed that all mankind was unique and that those things made no difference in his uniqueness. Simon also believed that if mankind could go back to believing in his own uniqueness, he could move from the living dead back into the world of the living. Simon told Og that it would only take a few to change the world and it was better to try and fail than to not try.

This chapter illuminates two of the main themes of the novel. First is friendship. Og talks in the beginning of the chapter of how Simon had become like a father to him, a father and a teacher as well as a spiritual advisor. Og looked up to Simon and learned a lot from him over the few months that they spent together. Their friendship was a deep relationship that changed Og's life, for the better, teaching him but also enriching his view of the world. This friendship had an impact that the reader can still feel many years after the fact.

The second theme the chapter illuminates is self-esteem. During their conversations together, Simon told Og his theories on why people were so miserable and what could be done to fix that. Simon believed that mankind in general had a low self-esteem, and had forgotten that mankind itself was a unique state of being, that man was God's



greatest creation. Mankind had become so bogged down in the knowledge of science, another theme of the book, that mankind had lost sight of what was unique about him, of the power within him. Simon believed that all mankind should have confidence, should face each moment of each day with the knowledge that they could do anything. Simon felt that someone should stand up and point this out to the world; someone should be what mankind had forgotten it could be, courageous and confident. Simon felt it was better to try and fail than to never try at all. This foreshadows the next few chapters as the reader begins to understand exactly what it is Simon wants from Og and why he sought him out as a friend.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

On Simon's seventy-ninth birthday, Og surprised him with a gift. Og remembered Simon mentioning his birth date and also remembered Simon telling him how he had always grown geraniums at his home in Frankfurt. Og scoured several stores before he found the perfect gift, a glass geranium. Simon was speechless, very pleased that Og remembered his birthday and went to the effort of getting him a gift. Simon made a big deal out of finding the perfect place for the plant when Og finally suggested that they plant it in the window box Simon had put outside his apartment window for the purpose of growing the flowers but had had no success. Now Og could see the plant whenever he was in the parking lot.

Afterward, Og brought up the God memorandum again. Simon told him he had thought Og had forgotten about it. Simon expressed concern that the world was not ready for such a document and that it would not be accepted, as it should be. Og said he understood that there was the possibility that some people would not believe, but that he thought there would be more who would. Simon then said that he felt that for the memorandum to be successful it would first have to be needed, that people would be ready to ask for the help it offered. Second, the memorandum would have a proper distribution. To that Og said he would put it in a book and distribute it to millions. Og asked if he could have a copy of it then to study, but Simon said no, not just yet, but soon.

Again touching on the theme of friendship, Og bought Simon a gift for his birthday, a glass geranium plant that they planted together in the window box where Simon had tried and failed to grow the real things. Simon was overwhelmed by Og's thoughtfulness, feeling real love for the first time since the war. Simon had not had a close friend or relative since that time, therefore he had not had a gift since that time. This is a reciprocation of the love that Og has felt from Simon and it seals their friendship.

Later they begin to discuss the God memorandum again. Simon was not ready to give it to Og yet because he had suddenly become concerned that it would not be accepted in the world quite the way he had hoped it would be. Simon believed that in order for it to be time to release the memo the world had to be like an alcoholic ready to ask for help with his addiction. Simon was not convinced the world had come to that point yet. Second, Simon wanted the memo to have a large distribution. Og agreed, saying that he would make sure it was made available to millions. However, Simon was still reluctant, foreshadowing a time later in the book when he finally allows Og access to the memo.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Og had been away for two weeks on the final promotional tour for his book and returned to his office to find a manila envelope waiting. On the envelope was a message from Simon that sounded to Og like a goodbye. Og immediately called his secretary into the office and demanded to know when the package had come. No one seemed to know. Og rushed out of his office and went to Simon's. When the door opened, instead of Simon it was a young mother with two children. Og assumed she was one of the people Simon was trying to help and asked for Simon. The woman claimed to have never heard of Simon and insisted that she had lived in that apartment for over four years. Everything inside the apartment was different. When the woman closed the door, Og studied the number, making sure it was number twenty-one. It was. Og then went down to the basement and asked the janitor if he knew Simon. The janitor claimed to have worked there more than eleven years and he knew nothing of Simon.

Og went to the police station and asked the sergeant if they had picked up anyone like Simon or if he could report him missing. The sergeant had not heard of him either and suggested that Og check the morgue. Og went to the hospital next, but they had no patients who filled Simon's description. Og went to the morgue. They had one man who fit Simon's description, but when Og viewed his body, he discovered it was not Simon. Og tried missing persons at another police station and still nothing. Back at his office, Og asked his secretary who lived nearby if she had ever seen Simon. She said she had not. Finally, Og opened the envelope Simon had left him. Inside he found a piece of cloth attached to a pin, a letter, and a copy of the God memorandum.

This chapter is strange both for Og and the reader. Where has Simon gone and why does no one remember him? Og was frantic because Simon was like a father to him, and he was old and vulnerable to the world. Og worked hard to find him but could not even find anyone who ever remembered seeing him. How could a man who helped so many people live in one place for more than ten years and no one know him? How could he live in an apartment for more than ten years while at the same time a woman claims to have lived there more than four? This chapter is very confusing for both Og and the reader, leaving both with a single explanation. Perhaps Simon was something more than just a man, more than a friend. Simon said once that God often works through man. Perhaps Simon was a messenger sent from God to give Og the God memorandum. Perhaps Simon was God himself.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Og read Simon's final letter to him. Within it, Simon told him that he must use the God memorandum himself before he could show it to anyone or have it published. Simon told him to wear the pin with the cloth attached to signify to the world what he was doing, but not to tell anyone who asked what it meant. Simon said he should read the God memorandum to himself every night before bed for one hundred days and that by doing this simple thing, it would change his life. Simon told Og in the letter that he could see thousands of people wearing the pin and recognizing each other on the street. However, Simon was concerned about what Og would say when asked about the memo and about Simon while promoting a book about the memo. Simon assured him however that he believed the memo was in good hands with Og. Og put down the letter and marked his calendar. Og was crying. Og found himself wondering if his tears were for Simon and his loss, or for the realization of who Simon really was.

This chapter again illuminates the theme of friendship. The friendship has ended, but the affection will be life long. Simon clearly loved Og and believed that he was a good man, which was why he entrusted Og with his God memorandum. This is a definition of friendship: the trust and affection that exists between these two men even in separation. Simon also instructed Og on how to use the God memorandum, something that Og immediately committed himself to, again underlining the affection and respect they have for each other that Og would do this without hesitation. These two men developed within each other such a deep respect that they have changed each other's lives. Under any other circumstance, should a man like Og have come across a memo like this one, he would have scoffed at it and forgotten about it. However, Og did not do that because he knew Simon, he loved Simon, and he felt loved by Simon. This fulfills foreshadowing from the beginning of the book when the differences between these two men were pointed out. At the end, there was little difference. These two men were so open to each other's ideas that they became more alike than they were before. This change had made Og ready and it was the purpose of the story to the reader, to help the reader become open and ready to accept the memo as well.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

The memo, entitled The God Memorandum, was written to you from God. It began with an assurance that God heard mankind's cries and had not forsaken him. God told mankind he knew what he cried for. However, God told mankind that his cries are unnecessary. God pointed out that mankind was created above all else, that God implanted the seeds of dreams in his head at birth. God told mankind to move above the past, that the past was dead and now He had come to raise them into the world of the living. God assured mankind that He loved him and would always love him, believing that mankind was the greatest miracle in the world. Then God went through all the things that made mankind unique. Every part of his body, his hearing, his sight, his ability to breath and to think, his beating heart and the cells of his skin. Then God outlined four rules for mankind to follow in order to move back into the world of the living. First was that mankind should count his blessings, namely everything about him that made him unique. Second, man should proclaim his rarity. Third, man should use his uniqueness to create his own happiness, to go another mile when it seemed impossible. Fourth, mankind should use his free will in order to do good deeds and to discover happiness. God told mankind that together they could create a new world filled with happiness. God insisted that mankind's unhappiness was not his doing and that if he would follow these simple rules he could find happiness again. God also assured mankind that he would always be beside him. Finally, God ended the memo by reminding mankind that he was the greatest miracle in the world.

This chapter is a copy of the memo Simon gave to Og. Simon claimed to have written the memo based on writings that he though God had helped write through divine inspiration. Simon took all these writings and summarized them in order to come up with the four simple rules of the memo. First, Simon suggested that God would want man to count his blessings, to realize everything he has instead of dwelling on all he does not. Second, Simon suggested that mankind take pride in what there is about him that makes him unique. This is an interesting rule that many Christians might find difficult because the Bible suggests that pride is a sin. Third, Simon said that man should go an extra mile rather than give up, exactly what Simon suggested to Og when talking about his theories on why mankind was so unhappy. Finally, Simon suggested that man use his free will to help him find happiness. These suggestions seem like common sense and make it plausible that Simon did find them in his books. These suggestions also fit well with all the things Simon had said in the past, fulfilling foreshadowing from the previous chapters.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

It was Christmas. Og was in his office after the office Christmas party, which he hated every year but always allowed. Og called his publisher, Frederick Fell, and told him that he wanted to write another book. Og told him that the book would be called, *The Greatest Miracle in the World*, and that he would need a year to write it. Og would not tell him what it was about, but Fell promised him a contract anyway, based on his past experiences. After he hung up, Og went to the parking lot to collect his car. While driving out of the parking lot, Og saw the twinkle of Simon's geranium plant.

This final chapter simply shows the reader how this book came about. Og got a contract for the book without telling his publisher what it was about, not only showing Og fulfilling his promise of not talking about the God Memorandum while still reading it and the trust of his publisher in his abilities to sell books. When he left, Og saw Simon's plant that he bought for his birthday shining in the window box. This seems to be an affirmation from Simon, acknowledging that Simon did exist and that he knows that Og was doing what he wanted from him. It is a heart-warming way to end the book.



Characters

Og Mandino

Simon Potter

Frederick Fell

Darwin

Copernicus

Professor Edward Dewey

Mankind

Lloyd Douglas

Lisha and Eric

Hafid



Objects/Places

The God Memorandum

The God Memorandum is a memo that Simon Potter wrote to help people regain their self-esteem and become successful members of society. Simon based his writings on the writings of authors whom he said were guided by the hand of God.

The Greatest Salesman of the World

The Greatest Salesman of the World is a book that Og Mandino wrote before he met Simon Potter. It is about the true secrets of success, in that it was generosity rather than achieving riches.

The Parking Lot

Simon and Og met in the parking lot where Og parked his car when he went into his office.

Wooden Cross

Simon wore a wooden cross around his neck that he said was made by one of the first people he helped to change his life.

Glass Geranium

Og bought Simon a glass geranium for his seventy-ninth birthday because it was Simon's favorite flower.

Apartment 21

Apartment 21 was where Og went to visit with Simon on many occasions over a year's time, and where Og met a woman who claimed to have lived there for more than four years and had no knowledge of Simon.

Foster Avenue Police Station

Og went to the Foster Avenue Police Station to report Simon missing and had no luck finding him there.



Morgue on West Polk

Og went to the morgue after he visited the hospital in his attempt to find Simon and viewed a body that turned out to not be Simon.

Success Unlimited Magazine

Success Unlimited is the name of the magazine that Og was the president of.

Chicago, Illinois

Og worked in Chicago at the time he met Simon.

Damascus

Damascus is where both Simon and the main character in Og's book based their businesses.

The Greatest Miracle in the World

The Greatest Miracle in the World is mankind, each person individually.

Themes

Friendship

One of the basic elements of this book is friendship. Og was a busy man who worked hard at his job and had a successful book at the same time. Og was always running off to meetings or promotional tours for his book and never had time to sit and do nothing until he met Simon Potter. Simon Potter changed Og's life, giving him a reason to just sit and do nothing. The two men met on a snowy day when Simon offered to help Og with the gate at the parking lot where he parked while at his office. Months later, Simon invited Og to have a sherry at his apartment. Soon the two men were spending most evenings together, sharing a drink and talking about things as simple as their own lives and the complicated philosophies of some of the world's greatest writers. Before Og realized, a friendship had arisen.

This friendship taught Og a great deal about life and how to be happy. Og had already written several books, one in particular was a self-help type that was popular at the time. Now he wanted to write another with the help of his friend. Simon inspired Og, Simon filled him with knowledge he wanted nothing better to do with than to share it with the world. If not for this friendship, Og never would have come into possession of the God memorandum or written this book. However, that is not the only reason why friendship is a theme of this book. The most important reason that friendship is a theme is because of the change Simon brought to Og's life. Og was a happy man, or at least he thought so. Simon came into his life and filled a space, giving something to Og that he had been missing up to that moment. At one point, Og compared Simon to a father figure, someone who taught him and helped build his self-esteem, just like a father would do. Simon was a dear friend and this is why friendship is a theme of this book.

Self Esteem

Simon believed that the main reason most people were not happy was because they had a low self-esteem. Simon thought that as human beings, as children of God, all people should think highly of themselves, that they should realize what an amazing gift their very bodies were. If people realized what a wonderful gift they had, they would use it to the highest potential; negative thoughts, such as how a person might not be capable of completing a certain task, would never enter their minds. Simon put the low self-esteem of the human race down to knowledge of the universe, to the theories of Darwin, and to the idea that planetary position can affect our moods and behaviors.

Simon called himself a ragpicker due to the fact that he felt that, like the junk collectors of the Depression Era, it was his self appointed job to go around picking human beings off the junk piles of low self-esteem. Simon felt these people who were miserable with their lack of success and with their personal lives were simply part of the living dead. Simon wanted to bring these people back to life, to raise their self-esteem, and to show



them that there was nothing they could not do if they put their mind to it. Simon wanted to change the world, so when he told Og about his God memorandum, he suggested that they could publish it. Simon only wanted in return for Og to use the memo as he prescribed before putting it into a book. Og agreed and Simon gave him the memo, but then he disappeared, leaving Og to believe there might have been something supernatural about him, that Simon might have been God himself come to share his knowledge with the world.

Knowledge

Simon was a very knowledgeable man, able to quote passages from a variety of books at the drop of a hat. Og was able to do the same, but he still learned a lot from Simon. Simon was able to teach Og about the ills of modern society, about the unique problems associated with mankind's lack of self-esteem, and how he believed they could change these problems. Through Simon, knowledge was a wonderful thing, an opportunity for Og to broaden his horizons and see the world in a way he had not before. Simon too used knowledge and the things that Og told him to enrich his life, to grow and to make his existence more rewarding.

However, knowledge is doubly faceted as a theme in this book. Knowledge is not only restricted to the good things about life, as Simon pointed out, but it also had the power to lower the self-esteem of mankind in a universal ripple that still affects men today. Knowledge of the universe and the idea that the earth is not the center of the universe changed the way that man looked at himself and the way he must have appeared in the eye of God. Man had always believed that they were God's children, his central priority, his only concern. However, when man learned that they were not the center of the universe, they began to doubt their magnificence as his most important creation. Second, when Darwin announced to the world that man evolved from apes, despite reservations regarding this theory, mankind again began to wonder about their magnificence in the eyes of God, about whether God really existed or if man was simply an accident of nature. Finally, when scientists began to probe the idea that our moods and behaviors might be directly linked to the position of the planets, many people lost faith in God and themselves altogether. Simon believed this was the root behind mankind's lack of self-esteem and man's inability to find happiness. That is why knowledge is a theme of this book.

Style

Perspective

Og Mandino was the president of *Success Unlimited Magazine* when he wrote this novel, a high school graduate who had found success as a writer and editor. Og Mandino had already written several books by this time as well, including his best seller, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*. Og was very successful in the world of non-fiction publishing. One day he met a man whose life was eerily similar to the life of the main character of his best selling book. This book is based on his relationship with that man and the things he learned from him.

Og Mandino believed that most unhappy people in the world were unhappy because they were essentially part of what he and his friend, Simon Potter, called the living dead. These people were alive, but they were not living up to their full potential and they were suffering from a terrible case of low self esteem. Simon had written a memorandum from God that was meant to help these people break out of the cycle of unhappiness and help them return to the world of the living. Og used this memo as Simon prescribed and agreed with Simon that this information needed to be given to the world at large to help more than the few people that Simon could help passing out the memo one at a time. This book was designed as a self-help book that would show people there was no reason to have low self-esteem and no reason why not everyone could be happy despite their limitations or perceived inability to compete in the world at large. This book was intended to help unhappy people find happiness.

Tone

This novel was written with a subjective tone. Og Mandino was especially close to Simon Potter, the man who inspired the book, and because of this, his tone could not be objective regarding the subject of the book, which is his relationship with Simon Potter and the God memorandum that Simon gave to him. Despite the unusual circumstances surrounding the end of his relationship with Simon, Og strongly believed that Simon knew what he was talking about when he wrote and gave to him the God memorandum. As a believer of everything written within this book, Og could hardly be objective, therefore the overall tone of the book is not only subjective, but it is full of enthusiasm and admiration for Simon Potter.

The tone of the book gives the reader a sense of intimacy, as though being giving a secret from a dear friend, which was exactly how Og saw it when he received the memo from Simon. Og wrote the book openly and honestly despite knowledge that it would be taken with some disbelief due to the implication that Simon was not an ordinary school janitor, but God himself come down to earth in order to request that Og distribute his memo to the world at large, to help mankind shake the problems they suffer due to low self esteem stemming from too much knowledge of the world and the universe at large.



Whether the reader believes the story within the book or not, the tone is not one of humor, it does not poke fun at itself or pretend that the events surrounding Og's relationship with Simon were anything but honest and caring, but states its story with honesty and courage, allowing the reader to take from it what they will.

Structure

The book is written in ten chapters with the ninth chapter taken completely up by the God memorandum. The book is written in both exposition and dialogue, similar to a novel, with many of the chapters divided into scenes revolving around Og's relationship with Simon. The book is relatively short and to the point, though the pace tends to be slow due to awkward dialogue.

The book is made up almost entirely of Og's relationship with Simon. The book begins on the first day the two men meet and moves through the beginnings of their relationship, the many conversations the two men share, and the end of the relationship when Simon suddenly disappears. Then the book contains the God memorandum that Simon had spoken to Og about on many occasions and finishes with Og making the decision to write a book regarding Simon and the God memorandum. The story is short and to the point, without any extras to confuse or stray from the point of the book. The timeline is linear and uncomplicated. The format works well as it is simple and easy for the reader to follow.



Quotes

"The first time I saw him? He was feeding pigeons." Chapter 1, pg. 11

"We sat, after the exchange, in a stillness interrupted only by an occasional rumble from a truck or bus bouncing along the ruts of Devon Avenue. I sipped the sherry and felt more relaxed and at peace with the world than I had in many months." Chapter 2, pg. 25

"Mister Og, I am not playing God. What you will Learn, sooner or later, is that God very often plays man. God will do nothing without man and whenever He works a miracle it is always done through man." Chapter 2, pg. 28

"I had been unable to get a handle on my feelings about the old man and it bothered me. He fascinated me... and, for some inexplicable reason, he frightened me." Chapter 3, pg. 30

"I turned my head and followed the direction of his open hand toward the tallest pile of 'hand of God' books in his living room. There, on the top of the pile, was mine!" Chapter 4, pg. 59

"Simon became my adopted father, my teacher, my business consultant, my comrade, my rabbi, my priest, my minister, my guru... my Delphic oracle." Chapter 5, pg. 60

"And so the two of us planted our ninety-five-dollar glass geranium." Chapter 6, pg. 79

"The thick brown manila envelope rested ominously on my desk on that Monday that I shall never forget." Chapter 7, pg. 84

"Remember that the most difficult tasks are consummated, not by a single explosive burst of energy or effort, but by the consistent daily application of the best you have within you." Chapter 8, pg. 95

"You are my greatest miracle. You are the greatest miracle in the world." Chapter 9, pg. 111

"You are more than a human being, you are a human becoming." Chapter 9, pg. 114

"Let me cut the grave cloths that have bound you. This day you have been notified."
Chapter 9, pg. 115



Topics for Discussion

Discuss self-esteem. Do you think that mankind has low self-esteem? Do you think all mankind falls under this idea or only some? What about successful people? What about poor people?

Why does Simon think Darwin has affected mankind's self esteem? Do you think this is true? Is it possible that God is the root of good self-esteem? Why or why not? Are religious people happier than non-believers? Are people who believe in Darwin unhappy people?

What about Copernicus? Why would his discoveries cause people to become saddened? Does earth have to be the center of the universe for mankind to be happy? If earth is not the center of the universe does that imply that mankind is not a priority to God?

Does this book have religious undertones? Why or why not? Do you think discussion of God or belief in God is necessarily religious in nature? Why or why not? Can a person believe in God and not be religious? Can a person not believe in God and find happiness?

Discuss Simon Potter. Who is Simon Potter? How does he happen to make friends with Og? To what purpose do you think he sought out Og? How did he simply disappear at the end of the book? Why? Why did no one in his building remember him? Was Simon someone other than who he said he was? Was Simon God or one of God's messengers?

If Simon was God or a messenger of God, what does that make Og? Is Og a messenger of God for publishing this book? Do you think Og was telling the truth about Simon, or do you think he made it up? Why did Og never introduce Simon to any of his friends or family?

Discuss the God memorandum. Do you believe something like this can truly change a person's outlook on life simply by reading it before bed for one hundred days? How does the memo make you feel? Do you believe you are the greatest miracle in the world?