

Armed and dangerous

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'Are you crazy?!' I heard the words often enough when I announced I was chucking up Bombay and heading out to Goa. But to me it didn't feel like crazy — it felt like a huge adventure, a wonderful quest that beckoned me at this late stage in life. A quest that I set off on in my rusty armour — far more Sancho Panza than Don Quixote really.

Penniless, directionless, I had however equipped myself with the most important things — a motto and a coat of arms. Essential to taking on dragons. If you don't have these, I suggest you invent them immediately. I have.

The Coelho Coat of Arms hath not four divisions but five. Four visible and one invisible. Four are the Quarters that are apparent. The fifth is the centre 'here'. The point at where we are. It is essential for us to know where we already are before we can orient ourselves in any other direction. Here I am. This is who I am.

Each of the four quarters represents an aspect of the four directions that together make up the quest. Quarter the First holds a Leaf from the Peepul Tree. The tree of wisdom, reputed always to be haunted by ghosts. Roots reaching downwards to form more trunks to prop up the vast spreading branches. Knowledge growing depth to support the spread of life and the branching of myriad interests.

Quarter the Second — holds a Quill made of a feather of flame — taken of course from the phoenix — that fabulous mythical bird that resurrects itself from the ashes.

It stands for all the times that you will have to resurrect yourself from the ashes of your life, of your loves, of your disastrous choices. And a quill of course because I'm a writer.

Quarter the Third — holds a blossom of the Gulmohaur — Red as blood and a reminder that passion is essential to all life and creation. Without passion of beliefs, loves, life — we live but pale echoes of thousands of others.

Quarter the Fourth — holds nothing. It is seemingly empty but represents indeed a clear pane of glass. It stands for perception. The personal lens through which each of us views the world. What you make of the world depends entirely on your perception of it. What you make of your life and yourself

depends again on your perception. Take trouble to wipe that glass clean — so that seeing is immediate and clear.

Now all you need is a motto and you are ready to take on your personal dragons, whatever they might be. Mine is 'Suffer ye no fools, give no quarter'.

And the quest? You have to find your own. From saving the world to getting the coffee machine in the office working right, to getting the income tax to cough up your refund... there are worthy causes a plenty in the world. And the smallest things can turn into mighty battles. Battles for cleaner air, dignity, respect — a little bit of a better life. Well worth fighting for. So if you're ready — let us once more into the breach!