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BODY:

Brazilian author Paulo Coelho is cultivating a modern version of the simple life. At home in France, he has the essentials: a fireplace, a view of the mountains, an Internet connection and a satellite dish.

When he first moved to the Pyrenees Mountains in 2002, he lived on-and-off for 2 1/2 years in a two-star hotel, which helped him get back to the basics.

"I realized I don't need a lot of things to be happy," he says.

That's a message that runs through his new book, "The Zahir," which, like the best seller "The Alchemist," is a lesson in personal fulfillment packaged as a novel.

When you're obsessed with something, "you don't follow the signs, you don't relax. You don't even understand why you want it, you want it like a child," Coelho says. "You start living for the obsession alone ... You want to arrive somewhere regardless of whether you're enjoying the road or not.

"I think it is a problem of our society that we don't enjoy (ourselves). We have these values, like, you have to be rich, you have to get a diploma, you have to work hard, otherwise you are useless, you are nothing but a pariah. And the book asks, 'Is it true? This is what my mom told me, but is it true?'"

In "I don't know why my books are successful and I don't try to explain," Coelho says, laughing. "I just enjoy, of course."

He also can't explain why he hasn't reached the same level of superstardom in the United States, where "The Zahir" was released Aug. 23 by HarperCollins.

"Let's put it this way: I did not yet reach a critical mass there yet," he says.

Four staff members answer Coelho's letters from around the world, but each night around 2 a.m., in the quiet of the Pyrenees night, he longs to have a look himself.

"You cannot imagine how important this connection is," he said. "You cannot imagine how alone a writer is - moreover, a writer who lives in the middle of nowhere."