The Alchemist

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PAULO COELHO

Paulo Coelho was born in 1947 and grew up in Brazil. From a young age, he was interested in literature and hoped to become a writer. He was an introverted and unusual teenager and, at age 17, his family admitted him to a mental hospital. He escaped three times over the course of his three-year stay. In an effort to conform to his parents' and community's standards, Coelho enrolled in law school. He dropped out after a year and led a life of wandering and poverty, traveling throughout South America, Mexico, Europe, and Africa. He worked as an actor, a theater director, a journalist, and a songwriter for other artists, before being arrested in 1974 for his "subversive" liberal song lyrics. Coelho's life was dramatically changed in 1986 when he completed a 500-mile pilgrimage walk in northwestern Spain: the Camino de Santiago (The Way of St. James). While on pilgrimage, Coelho experienced a spiritual awakening which encouraged him to follow his dream of becoming a writer. Coelho appears to pay homage to this transformative experience with the name of *The Alchemist*'s protagonist: Santiago. Coelho's most famous novel, *The Alchemist*, was published in 1988. It was his third book, following an unsuccessful first book *Hell Archives* (1982), and a non-fiction account of his spiritual awakening on the Camino de Santiago, *The Pilgrimage* (1986). In 1994, HarperCollins picked up *The Alchemist* after its small initial printing. After that, it became a worldwide phenomenon, establishing Paulo Coelho as a household name. Since then, Coelho has published regularly, bringing his total published works up to thirty. He continues to write, and he and his wife divide their time between Rio de Janeiro and the Pyrenees Mountains of France.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a contemporary novel, Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* responds to the concerns of a generation growing up in an age of rapidly advancing technology and globalization. Published during continued international Cold War tensions in the late 1980s, the novel deals directly with themes of fear and control. The Cold War between the US and the USSR prominently and publically featured massive military technological advancements, and nuclear warfare was a real possibility. Coelho's novel directly cautions against letting fear overpower one's individual life decisions. The novel also strongly advocates for the power of the individual to take charge of his future. This message has impacted people across cultures in a generation when international exposure to the horrors of the world has paralyzed many people. In addition to this contemporary context, *The Alchemist* also responds to a much older history in terms of the role of religion and spirituality in the novel. The story was inspired by Coelho's pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago, a route of pilgrimage that became popular in the Middle Ages, leading travelers to a shrine for the apostle James in Northwestern Spain. The parallel between this journey and Santiago's quest in the novel is clear, as Santiago's route also features Spain and emphasizes the spiritual development acquired by pilgrims along the journey. Coelho's Catholic background influenced his understanding of religion, but he departs from strict Christian terminology in his novel, instead using terms such as "The Soul of The World" to refer to a spiritual force connecting all of creation.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The basic story line of *The Alchemist* is not of Coelho's invention, and has its roots in much older literature. A parable of two dreamers who both dream of the other's treasure appears in a traditional Jewish story. 13th century Persian poet and scholar Rumi also created a story featuring two dreamers titled "In Baghdad, Dreaming of Cairo: In Cairo, Dreaming of Baghdad." Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges repurposed these older accounts in his 1935 short story "Tale of Two Dreamers." Coelho, a South American writer like Borges, is joining a tradition. It is also fitting that he selected a Jewish parable as the frame for his novel, which deals explicitly with religion, and yet updates these themes for a contemporary audience. This complex use of both existing literature and contemporary context is clear in the character of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a Biblical figure who is mentioned in the Bible as a priest and the King of Salem, but whose character is not fully developed. Coelho repurposes Melchizedek, assigning him a new role as the protector of people pursuing their Personal Legends, while maintaining Biblical details about the character such as his title of "King of Salem."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Alchemist
- **When Written:** 1987
- **Where Written:** Brazil
- **When Published:** 1988
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Allegorical Fiction
- **Setting:** Southern Spain and Northern Africa
- **Climax:** Santiago does not discover his treasure at the pyramids, and is attacked by refugees of the desert wars. The leader of the refugees speaks of his dream about treasure,

and the truth about Santiago's treasure is revealed to him.

- **Point of View:** Third person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Guinness World Record. *The Alchemist* is the most translated book by a living author, and one of the best selling books ever, which speaks to its universal qualities. It appeals to readers from many different backgrounds.

Two weeks. It took Paulo Coelho only two weeks to write *The Alchemist* in the year 1987. He says that the story was already "written in [his] soul." He was inspired by his life-changing pilgrimage in Spain on the Camino de Santiago.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the Prologue, the alchemist reads a story about Narcissus—a youth so fascinated by his own beautiful reflection that he falls into a lake and drowns. In this version of the story, the goddess of the forest encounters the lake in which Narcissus drowned. The lake is weeping, and the goddess assumes that the lake misses Narcissus's beauty. However, the lake reveals that, actually, it's weeping because it misses being able to admire its own beautiful reflection in Narcissus's eyes. "What a lovely story," the alchemist thinks.

In Part One of the novel, Santiago passes the night with his flock of **sheep** in an **abandoned church**. That night, he has a recurring dream. When he wakes, he looks forward to the village he will reach in four days where, the year before, he met a girl, the daughter of a merchant. Meeting her made him wish, for the first time in his life, that he could remain in one place. Santiago loves to travel, and became a shepherd, rather than a priest as his family had wanted, because his father told him that, among poor folk, only shepherds had the opportunity to travel.

A few days before reaching the merchant's daughter's village, Santiago encounters a fortune-teller, whom he hopes will be able to interpret his recurring dream. In the dream, a child transports Santiago to the **Pyramids of Egypt** and promises he will find hidden treasure there, but Santiago always wakes up just as the child is about to reveal it. After making Santiago promise to give her one-tenth of the treasure as payment, the fortuneteller interprets the dream to mean that if Santiago journeys to the pyramids, he'll find hidden treasure.

Annoyed that he could have come to this interpretation on his own, Santiago leaves, and soon sits down in the plaza to read his book. An old man sits down next to him and says that it's an important book, but that it contains the world's greatest lie: that we do not control what happens to us. The old man introduces himself as Melchizedek, the King of Salem, and adds that if Santiago gives him one-tenth of this sheep, he will tell Santiago how to find his treasure. Santiago wonders if the old man and the fortune-teller are working together to rob him, but gives up his suspicions when Melchizedek demonstrates knowledge of things about Santiago's life he couldn't possibly know. Melchizedek explains that Santiago has discovered his Personal Legend – the thing a person has always wanted to accomplish. Each person knows what it is when he is young, but loses track of it as he ages. Melchizedek says that he appears to people in moments when they are about to give up on their Personal Legends.

The next day, Santiago meets Melchizedek and gives him six sheep. He sells his other sheep to a friend who dreamed of becoming a shepherd. Melchizedek says that to find his treasure, Santiago will have to follow the omens God reveals to him. Melchizedek gives Santiago two stones, called **Urim and Thummin**, which can be used for fortune telling. But he cautions Santiago also to rely on his own decisions.

Santiago arrives in Morocco, but quickly gets robbed and winds up sleeping in a marketplace. Eventually, Santiago wanders into a crystal shop and asks the crystal merchant for a job in exchange for something to eat. After Santiago cleans crystal all day, the merchant gives him dinner. Santiago is crushed when he learns that he would have to work for years to earn enough money to travel to the Pyramids, but he decides to work for the merchant in order to earn money to buy some sheep.

As Part Two of the novel opens, Santiago is working for the crystal merchant. He wants to build a display case to draw more attention to the store, but the merchant resists. The merchant doesn't like change, and explains that he has always been an observant Muslim, but has never made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Though he could now, finally, afford the trip, he still puts it off because he fears not having something to look forward to in his future. He doesn't want to realize his dream; he just wants to dream. But he does give Santiago permission to build the display case.

Business at the shop increases. Santiago is pleased that he is working toward his goal of acquiring an even larger flock of sheep. He has also earned to recognize omens: when he sees a man out of breath after climbing the hill to the shop, he realizes they should sell tea in the crystal they are selling. The merchant knows that this will change the nature of the business, but he feels he cannot resist the inevitable, or as he says "maktub," meaning "it is written." He sees Santiago's appearance in his life as both a blessing and a curse. Santiago saved his business, but also showed him what his business was capable of, meaning he can never again be content with the simple business he had.

Soon Santiago has enough money to buy a large herd of sheep, but before doing so he happens upon Urim and Thummin in his old shepherd's bag and decides instead to pursue his treasure. He suddenly feels tremendously happy, and finds a caravan crossing the desert. As he waits for the caravan to leave, Santiago meets an Englishman who tells him that there is a

universal language understood by everybody. He says he is in search of that language, and hopes to find an alchemist in the desert who can teach him more.

As the caravan travels to the desert **oasis** of Al-Fayoum, Santiago becomes friends with a camel driver who used to be a farmer before his land was flooded. The camel driver says that disaster taught him to understand that many people are afraid of losing what they have, but this fear is no longer relevant when you understand that human lives were written by the same hand that created the world. He also advises Santiago that if you can concentrate on the present, you'll be happy. Meanwhile, the Englishman tells Santiago of a common principle that connects all things – the Soul of the World – and lends Santiago some books about the Master Work of alchemy: an **Emerald Tablet,** on which was written the secret to creating the Philosopher's Stone, which could turn lead into gold, and the Elixir of Life, which granted mortality.

The caravan arrives safely at the oasis, which is the size of a large city. The oasis is neutral in the constant wars of the surrounding tribes, and no one can carry weapons there. Santiago helps the Englishman search for the alchemist, but with little luck. At one point, Santiago approaches a young woman to ask about the alchemist and suddenly he feels the Soul of the World. Immediately he realizes that the universal language is love. He meets with the woman, Fatima, day after day, and tells her of his quest for his treasure and how it has brought him to her. Eventually, Fatima tells Santiago that she has learned about omens from his stories, and that because of this learning she wants Santiago to continue toward his goal and pursue his dream. Fatima says "maktub," and tells Santiago that if they are really meant to be together, then he'll return to her one day.

One day as he walks in the desert, Santiago sees a hawk attack another and has a vision of an army attacking the oasis. Santiago goes to the tribal chieftains of the oasis to warn them. The chieftains respond that the next day the men of the oasis will break the agreement of the oasis and carry arms — if Santiago's warning proves true he will be rewarded; but if it does not, he will lose his life.

Santiago leaves the chieftains' tent upset, when suddenly a strange man on horseback confronts him. Santiago embraces the possibility of his own death and is not afraid. The stranger then reveals this was a test of Santiago's courage, which is essential when one wants to understand the Language of the World. Santiago has met the alchemist.

The next day, Santiago's prophecy is fulfilled and the oasis is attacked, but the inhabitants of the oasis are ready to defend themselves. Santiago receives his reward: fifty pieces of gold. Soon after, the alchemist takes Santiago out into the desert to test whether he can find life in the desert. Santiago allows his horse to lead them, and the find a snake –the alchemist agrees to guide Santiago across the desert. Santiago wants to stay at the oasis because of Fatima, but the alchemist explains that if he stays, he will be haunted by the loss of his opportunity to find his treasure.

As they travel in the desert, the alchemist explains that the Emerald Tablet is a direct link to the Soul of the World. In the early times, everything about the Master Work could be written on the Emerald Tablet. But men rejected simple things. The alchemist directs Santiago back toward this simplicity, and says that Santiago should listen to his heart, because it came from the Soul of the World. Santiago practices listening to his heart, and comes to understand his heart's changes and contradictions, and that people are afraid to pursue their most important dreams because they know they will suffer if they don't succeed.

Not long after, Santiago and the alchemist are taken prisoner by one of the warring tribes. Soon they are brought before the enemy chieftain, who thinks that they're spies. The alchemist responds that Santiago is an alchemist who can turn himself into the wind, and says that if Santiago has not turned himself into the wind in three days time, the chieftain can kill them. The chieftain agrees.

Once they're alone, Santiago protests that he has no idea how to turn himself into the wind, but the alchemist responds that when a person is living out his Personal Legend, he has all the tools he needs—the only thing that could hold him back is the fear of failure. He adds that if Santiago does not succeed, then at least he'll die while trying to realize his Personal Legend.

On the first and second days, Santiago is at a loss. On the third day, the enemy chieftain has Santiago go up to a cliff above the enemy camp. Santiago appeals to the desert, the wind, and the sun to help him, but none of them are able. The sun recommends that Santiago speak directly to the "hand that wrote all," though, and Santiago reaches through the Soul of the World and discovers the Soul of God. He sees the oneness between his own soul and the Soul of God and, because of this oneness, realizes that he has the ability to perform miracles. Santiago turns himself into the wind, creating a terrible windstorm. The tribesmen are terrified, but the alchemist is happy to have found such an ideal student, and the enemy chieftain is pleased to have witnessed the glory of Allah. The next day, Santiago and the alchemist leave the camp with an honor guard.

Eventually they reach a Coptic monastery, where a monk welcomes them inside to rest. While there, the alchemist uses the Philosopher's Stone to change lead into gold. He gives a quarter of the gold to the monk for his hospitality, a quarter to Santiago to repay him for the amount taken by the enemy chieftain, and quarter for himself. The final quarter he gives to the monk, saying that it is for Santiago if he ever needs it. The alchemist tells Santiago everyone on earth plays an important role, even if he doesn't know it. Then the alchemist bids Santiago farewell.

Santiago rides alone through the desert, listening to his heart, which tells him that he will find his treasure at the place where he is brought to tears. At the top of a dune, Santiago sees the Egyptian pyramids before him. He falls to his knees and cries out in thanks to God for making him follow his Personal Legend. Remembering the words of his heart, Santiago digs in the place he fell to his knees crying.

As he digs, several people approach Santiago. They are desperate refugees from the tribal wars, and they beat Santiago and take the gold given to him by the alchemist. When Santiago tells them he is looking for treasure at that place, the leader of the refugees says he's being stupid. The leader adds that two years earlier he himself had a recurring dream in which he saw an abandoned church that sheltered shepherds and sheep. The dream told him that if he dug at the roots of the tree growing through the center of the church, he would find a hidden treasure. But he never went in search of the treasure, because it was just a dream. After the refugees have left, Santiago laughs aloud, because now he knows the location of his treasure.

In the Epilogue, Santiago reaches the abandoned church where his story began. He thinks of the strangeness of the path that God has led him on, but is grateful for the people he has met along the way. He soon uncovers a chest of gold and jewels. The wind begins to blow, and it brings with it a familiar scent of perfume. Santiago smiles and says, "I'm coming, Fatima."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Santiago – The novel's protagonist, a young shepherd who sets out on a quest for treasure after an encounter with a wise man named Melchizedek. Santiago learns from Melchizedek that each person has the opportunity to pursue his or her Personal Legend, and Santiago follows his from Southern Spain to **the Egyptian Pyramids** and back. Along the way Santiago encounters a variety of characters who teach him about life and listening to his heart. By the end of the novel, Santiago is confident in himself and in the Soul of the World, which he believes looks out for him and connects all things.

The Alchemist – The title character of the story, the alchemist meets Santiago in **the oasis** where Santiago's desert caravan stops to avoid the tribal wars. The alchemist is a mentor for Santiago, and he travels with him from the oasis nearly to the **pyramids**. The alchemist practices the traditional methods of **alchemy**, studying metals and the process of turning non-precious metal into gold, but he also shows Santiago how these lessons are applicable to all of life. He teaches the young man that all of creation is interconnected and that he can learn all he needs to know from studying any one thing, and from listening to his heart.

Melchizedek (the Old Man) – A wise man who meets Santiago at the beginning of his quest to find his treasure. The fortune-teller has told Santiago of the treasure, but he is not convinced to pursue it until he meets Melchizedek. Melchizedek tells him that he appears to people at the moment when they are considering giving up on their Personal Legends. Melchizedek is a Biblical figure known as the King of Salem, and is venerated as a saint.

Fatima – Santiago's love interest, Fatima is a woman living in the desert **oasis**. As a desert woman, she is stoic and steadfast. The love between Santiago and Fatima is help up as ideal – a love that is sincere and true but also involves faith rather than any effort to control the beloved. Fatima believes in letting her beloved Santiago wander free, and encourages him to pursue his Personal Legend. She promises to wait for him while he does so.

The Englishman – a British man who has come to northern Africa in search of the alchemist. He has studied **alchemy** from books, but he wishes to complete the Master Work—the production of the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life—and he feels that he'll be able to learn these things from the alchemist. He and Santiago develop a companionship, despite their differences. Santiago encourages the Englishman to observe the caravan and the desert more, and the Englishman encourages Santiago to read more. Once in the oasis, the Englishman overcomes his fear of failure and starts to work on the Master Work.

The Camel Driver – An unnamed camel driver accompanies the desert caravan and shares his life perspective with Santiago. The camel driver lives entirely in the moment, and therefore does not fear death or the possibility of dying, even though his caravan travels through the tribal wars in the desert. Santiago learns patience from the camel driver, and how to do each thing in its own time.

The Crystal Merchant – When Santiago first arrives in Morocco, he is robbed and at a loss for how to either continue his quest or to return to his homeland. He sees a crystal shop and asks the merchant for work. He then continues to work with the crystal merchant for several months, because the man is a fair employer. Santiago is innovative, and encourages the crystal merchant to expand his business by adding an outdoor display, and by also selling tea. The crystal merchant resists these changes, because he is content with his small business, just as he fears realizing his dream of traveling to Mecca, because he worries that he won't have anything to live for if his dream is realized.

The Fortune-teller – A gypsy woman whom Santiago meets at the beginning of the novel. She interprets his recurring dream about **the Egyptian Pyramids** as a sign that he should travel to that place and seek a great treasure. As payment, she makes Santiago promise her 1/10th of the total of his treasure. When

Santiago eventually finds the treasure, he holds true to this promise.

The Thief (the Young Man) – When Santiago arrives at the city of Tangier in Morocco, he stops at a bar where he meets a young man who speaks Spanish. Santiago wants to pay the young man to serve as a guide to take him to the **pyramids**, but the young man takes his money and then vanishes in the busy market plaza.

The Elder Chief of Al-Fayoum – The elder chief is the leader of the tribal people living in the **oasis** Al-Fayoum. Santiago goes to the chieftains with his vision of a future in which the oasis, a supposed neutral zone, is attacked by an enemy tribe. The elder chief makes the decision to believe Santiago and to arm his people, but he says that if the prophecy does not come true, Santiago will be killed. The prophecy is fulfilled, and the oasis people are able to hold off the potential invaders.

The Enemy Chieftan – As they travel toward the **pyramids**, Santiago and the alchemist are taken prisoner by a tribe engaged in the desert wars. The alchemist bargains for their lives by asking that they be given three days to let Santiago demonstrate that he can turn himself into the wind. As Santiago attempts this, the wind blows fiercely. While the other tribesmen beg to end the storm, the general insists that he wants to see the power of Allah, and won't give up until Santiago succeeds. Once Santiago succeeds, the general honors his promise and frees him and the alchemist.

The Leader of the Refugees – When Santiago is digging for his treasure near the **pyramids**, he is approached by a group of refugees from the tribal wars. The men beat him and steal the portion of gold he is carrying. The leader of the refugees tells Santiago that he will not find treasure in that place. Two years earlier the leader of the refugees slept on that same spot, and had a dream about an **abandoned church** in Spain where there was buried treasure. From this, Santiago realizes the truth of where his treasure is buried.

Santiago's Heart – Santiago's heart is given a voice and distinct characteristics as he learns to listen to what it says. His heart is afraid of losing his loved ones and of Santiago not finding his treasure, because the heart knows that it will suffer if these things happen. Santiago also learns from his heart how to hear the Language of the World, and to communicate with the desert, the wind, and the sun.

The Desert – When Santiago and the alchemist are taken prisoner by a hostile tribe, the alchemist barters for their release and uses as leverage the opportunity to see Santiago turn himself into the wind. Santiago then listens to his heart, which allows him to speak to the desert, the wind, and the sun, as he tries to learn how to transform himself. Santiago speaks to the desert about love, and the desert offers its sands to help the wind blow, but it cannot transform Santiago into the wind.

The Wind – When Santiago and the alchemist are taken prisoner by a hostile tribe, the alchemist barters for their release and uses as leverage the opportunity to see Santiago turn himself into the wind. Santiago then listens to his heart, which allows him to speak to the desert, the wind, and the sun, as he tries to learn how to transform himself. Santiago speaks to the wind, which resists his request. The wind is proud, but it realizes that even it cannot transform Santiago into the wind. It blows a storm of sand into the air so that Santiago can look at and speak to the sun without blinding himself.

The Sun – When Santiago and the alchemist are taken prisoner by a hostile tribe, the alchemist barters for their release and uses as leverage the opportunity to see Santiago turn himself into the wind. Santiago then listens to his heart, which allows him to speak to the desert, the wind, and the sun, as he tries to learn how to transform himself. Santiago speaks to the sun, and it speaks to him about the creation of everything. The sun tells him to pray to "the hand that wrote all" in order to achieve his transformation.

The Merchant's Daughter – The daughter of a merchant to whom Santiago sold some **sheep**. She is the object of Santiago's affections at the beginning of the novel, and he impresses her with his stories. Although Santiago anticipates his return to her, the merchant's daughter is forgotten when he sets out on his quest to actualize his Personal Legend. On his quest Santiago meets and falls in love with Fatima.

Narcissus – Narcissus appears in the brief prologue to the novel, in the context of a story read by the alchemist. As in his original Ancient Greek legend, Narcissus is so in love with his own beautiful reflection that he gazes at it in a lake until he falls into the water and drowns.

The Lake – The Lake appears in the brief prologue to the novel, in the context of a story read by the alchemist. In a twist on the original Greek legend, the lake mourns for Narcissus because she has lost the opportunity to see her own beautiful reflection in *his* eyes. The prologue functions as a cautionary tale against self-love.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Santiago's Father – Santiago's father wanted him to become a priest, but he respected his son's dream and gave him gold to buy his flock of sheep, so that Santiago could travel as a shepherd.

The Monk – The alchemist and Santiago part ways near the end of Santiago's quest, at a monastery in the desert where they are welcomed by a generous monk. The alchemist turns metal into gold in the monk's kitchen, and gives the monk a portion for his generosity to pilgrims.

The Merchant – Early in the novel, Santiago is contemplating his annual return to a town where he sells some of his **sheep**. The previous year he sold his sheep to a merchant there, and grew infatuated with the merchant's daughter while waiting to

deal with the man.

The Goddess of the Forest – The goddess of the forest appears in the brief prologue to the novel, in the context of a story read by the alchemist. In the story, the goddess questions the lake about her weeping, and assumes she weeps for the dead Narcissus.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE PURSUIT OF YOUR PERSONAL LEGEND

The most prominent theme in *The Alchemist* is the idea that each person has a "Personal Legend"—a type of ideal fate or destiny—and that each person can chose whether or not to pursue that legend. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Santiago is launched on a quest for his treasure—his Personal Legend—through his encounter with Melchizedek, a wise old man. Melchizedek is a Biblical figure, but in the context of the novel, he says that he appears at critical moments when a person might be giving up on pursuing his or her Personal Legend. Melchizedek explains to Santiago that all people know their Personal Legend in their youth, but they forget this Legend as they age because they are blinded and blocked by fear, anxiety, and other worldly concerns. Sometimes even good things, such as love, get in the way of a person pursuing a Personal Legend, as almost happens to Santiago when he considers staying permanently with Fatima in the desert **oasis**.

The novel strongly suggests that although the choice to pursue the Legend is entirely up to the individual, the outcome is always better when the Legend is achieved. Yet as Santiago realizes near the end of the novel, this life improvement comes not so much from the simple achievement of the Legend, but instead from the purpose and engagement that pursuit of the Legend gives to one's everyday life. As it turns out, Santiago was physically close to his treasure from the start, but his journey to reach the treasure was lengthy in both time and distance. Without the journey, however, Santiago would not have learned all that he did, met the people he met, or fallen in love. Santiago also realizes that to die while in pursuit of one's Personal Legend alleviates the horror of death. There is "rightness" to being on the course to one's Legend, even though the journey is not easy. The book argues that choosing to pursue one's Personal Legend is the most important choice each human gets to make.

MAKTUB AND WHAT IS MEANT TO BE

"Maktub" is a phrase first used by the crystal merchant who employs Santiago, and later it is adopted by other characters, including Santiago, the camel driver, and Fatima. The phrase means, "It is written," and it is used by these characters to express their conviction that some things are "meant to be." Rather than having faith in a God with a changeable will, these characters believe in a steadfast, universal plan behind all things. And yet within the novel, the idea of "Maktub" is never presented as contradictory to the free will of the individual in choosing to seek his or her Personal Legend.

The concept of "Maktub" relieves several of the characters of the anxiety of decision-making and risk-taking. For example, the camel driver's trust in the ways of world, which he believes are "written," helps him to show Santiago why death need not be feared. The camel driver explains that death is simply a fact, something that is written, and its horror and dread vanishes when one lives in the moment without anxiety over what cannot be changed. Fatima also employs the term "Maktub" to explain her trust in Santiago and their love for each other. She believes that if she and Santiago are intended to be together, he will return to her. This relieves her of the anxiety of his departure, because she trusts that what is "written" will come to pass. If he does not return, it is because their love was not intended to be eternal and true.

Maktub can also be a confusing concept, however, as it includes both change and permanence. Santiago foresees the future—an invasion of the **oasis**—and he is able to intervene and prevent this outcome. This implies that the future is not completely settled or "written" in a way that is unchangeable—but once Santiago understands that all things *are* "written," he is able to speak the Language of the World. This is because everything, including the future, is indeed pre-written. This knowledge helps Santiago to learn how to turn himself into the wind when he needs to impress and escape from the desert tribesmen who take him and the alchemist captive. While this ability to have complete knowledge may seem contradictory to the ability to change the future, the book argues that the world (in which all things are interconnected) is certain, as is one's destiny, and yet any individual can *choose* to pursue that destiny or not. The novel also suggests that when one is on that course of pursuing destiny, all knowledge is available. When one is not on that course, however, one's life is not fulfilled. One's destiny exists (in the sense that it is written and meant to be), but it is not always realized.

THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF ALL THINGS

After Santiago arrives in the desert during his pursuit of his Personal Legend, he begins to realize

that there is a universal language spoken by all humans, animals, and objects. He learns to speak to the sun and the wind by listening to the desert and by listening to his heart, which can speak the Language of the World. This Language allows him to access "The Soul of The World," which is a God-like oneness of all things. The novel's portrayal of a universal language and The Soul of The World demonstrates its theme of the interconnectedness of all things.

Santiago feels a great sense of unity with other people, places, and objects he encounters on his quest, and his ability to access this feeling of unity allows him to learn about the world. For example, the alchemist challenges Santiago to find life in the desert, and Santiago realizes that he does not need advanced skills to do this. He realizes that the interconnectedness of all things allows his horse to be aware of the world, and that life attracts life. He lets his horse lead him to rocks where a snake lives.

The alchemist, an unsurprisingly important figure in the novel given its title, nevertheless does *not* teach Santiago the literal practices of **alchemy** in which metals are processed and transformed into gold. But he *does* help Santiago see that the processes of alchemy, such as purifying and simplifying or observing something to learn from it, are applicable to all of life. For example, Santiago learns from the alchemist that studying the world will teach him everything he needs to know, just as studying the Englishman's texts might have taught him the particulars of alchemy. Because of the interconnectedness of all things, the world itself is a great teacher. Any one thing, no matter how small, allows access to the entirety of creation. A metal can access and become gold because of this oneness, and Santiago can transform himself into the wind because of this oneness. The novel portrays tapping into the interconnectedness of things as the goal of both alchemy and the pursuit of one's Personal Legend.

ALCHEMY AND THE VALUE OF SIMPLICITY

Throughout the novel, **alchemy** often functions as a symbol or metaphor for lessons that Santiago learns about life and the world. At the heart of alchemy is **the Emerald Tablet**, an ancient artifact on which was written the instructions for creating the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, the two most important creations an alchemist can attempt to produce. The alchemist teaches Santiago that in modern times, the Stone and the Elixir are incredibly difficult to produce, because humans began to mistrust simplicity. Instead, they compiled massive amounts of information and practical knowledge about the Stone and Elixir and how to create them, and all of this information got in the way of a truth simple enough that it could be written on a single stone. Because the lessons of alchemy in the novel are more broadly applicable as life lessons, Santiago learns from the alchemist that sometimes complexity can obscure the truth, which is simple.

The alchemist also highlights the value of simplicity as it connects to purity. He tells Santiago that if he finds something made of pure matter, it never spoils. As the alchemist explains this principle, Santiago realizes that it also applies to the love he shares with Fatima. Because their love is simple, and it does not involve other notions of dependency or ownership, it will not spoil. Fatima herself demonstrates the power of simplicity through her faith in Santiago's return. She does not complicate their love with other emotions or conditions, and Santiago learns the value of this type of love without ownership.

The concept of the Soul of the World also implies the value of simplicity, because any one object in the world can be used to learn about and access the whole world. This places immense value on simple and small objects. As the alchemist says, a grain of sand can teach someone everything there is to know about the desert. Therefore, it is valuable to study and learn from the small things. Santiago realizes that even before he set off in pursuit of his Personal Legend, he learned some of the most important life lessons from his **sheep**—simple and humble creatures, which nevertheless demonstrate important qualities. The novel repeatedly presents simplicity, as opposed to complexity, as the means to accessing fundamental truths and life lessons, and often uses alchemical imagery to emphasize this point.

THE UNIMPORTANCE OF DEATH AND FEAR

The novel presents the fear of death, and fear in general, as obstacles that prevent people from living meaningful lives and achieving their Personal Legends. The crystal merchant is a perfect example of this. The crystal merchant is unwilling to pursue his Personal Legend (and the requirement of his religious faith) by traveling to Mecca, because he is afraid of what his life will be like after completing this goal. He tells himself that he is staying alive and working hard because he's holding onto the goal of Mecca—and yet he always pushes this goal into the future, keeping it as a distant dream and not something he is actively pursuing. He does this to protect himself from his fear of an uncertain future.

In contrast, one of the lessons Santiago learns from the stoic and wise camel driver is to live in the present moment, rather than the future or the past. The camel driver teaches that dying one day is no different than dying on any other day, and in explaining this, he emphasizes that the only thing of importance is the present. He does not fear death because he does not look to the future, and his reward is the quality of his life in each given moment. Because Santiago comes to believe that death is not a threat, he is able follow the omens God lays out before him, and to do so without fear. He also learns how to appreciate life as it is lived, and to find and experience the happiness and

joy of being alive in the present.

The novel also shows how the pursuit of one's Personal Legend emphasizes the insignificance of death and fear. As Santiago ventures into the desert in pursuit of his treasure and finds himself amidst the desert wars, he realizes that if he dies, at least he will have died while in pursuit of his Personal Legend. Because the pursuit of his Personal Legend is the fullest expression of himself, Santiago recognizes that following his Legend is worth any risk, even the risk of death. The critical importance of a Personal Legend deemphasizes the horror of death—and living without a Personal Legend is a kind of death anyway, as it involves living without truly being oneself. As the alchemist puts it, fear will prevent Santiago from listening to his heart, and it will prevent him from accessing his own self, which in turn is his key to accessing the Soul of the World. And so the novel is, in a sense, an argument against all those who allow fear to dictate the direction of their lives.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SANTIAGO'S SHEEP

Santiago is introduced in the novel as a shepherd, and although he sells his sheep to travel to **the Pyramids of Egypt**, he continues to reflect on his life as a shepherd throughout the novel. Many of the lessons he learns on his journey also reinforce things he discovered by being a shepherd. There is a humbleness and simplicity to Santiago's sheep, and the novel reveals these qualities to contain great value. For example, the symbol of **the Emerald Tablet** reveals the value of humility and simplicity, and the humble characters who support and guide Santiago on his quest include poor merchants, the camel driver, and a generous monk. Even Melchizedek, a powerful individual and a king, appears to Santiago in the guise of a poor old man. Therefore the sheep, in their quiet yet fulfilled lives, symbolize the values of humility, simplicity, and self-actualization. They are living out their Personal Legends as they graze and roam contentedly.

Santiago also learns life lessons by watching his sheep, and later these lessons are reinforced as he observes the desert and listens to his heart. Coelho suggests that because of the interconnectedness of all things, anything can be learned from observing one small part of creation. Santiago's sheep thus also symbolize the potential of learning through observation, as well as the importance of observing even the seemingly unimportant aspects of life.

URIM AND THUMMIM

Urim and Thummim are fortune-telling stones that Melchizedek gives to Santiago. The stones are black and white, with their colors representing "yes" and "no" answers to questions—so Melchizedek tells Santiago that he must only ask objective questions of the stones. Because of this, Urim and Thummim symbolize certainty and objective knowledge. This type of certainty, however, is ultimately presented as less valuable than the opportunity to learn from the world and to make one's own choices. Santiago carries the stones with him throughout the novel, but never uses them, having promised to "make his own decisions." The constant presence of Urim and Thummim thus also represents the human desire to give up control and decision-making ability. The greatest lie in the world, as stated by Melchizedek, is that humans don't control their fates. Although Melchizedek is the one who offers the stones to Santiago, they also symbolize the very thing that he says Santiago should avoid: trusting in anything other than himself to make a decision.

ALCHEMY

Both the Englishman and the alchemist describe the practices of alchemy to Santiago, and in both cases, the specifics of alchemy symbolize larger life lessons. The Englishman explains that the pursuit of the Master Work, in which alchemists spend years carefully studying and purifying metals, actually purifies the alchemists themselves. Self-development goes hand-in-hand with development of the Master Work. From this, Santiago realizes that one may pursue "an alchemy of life," in which self-development results from study of the world and from application of the other principles of alchemy to everyday practices. Later the alchemist describes many aspects of alchemy—like the origins of **the Emerald Tablet**—which are also applicable to human life. The alchemist explains Santiago's connection with Fatima in terms of alchemy, saying that a pure material cannot be tarnished or changed. This is a concept from alchemy, but Coelho uses it as a metaphor for life, and in this context it claims that the love between Fatima and Santiago will not spoil with time—if that love is pure.

THE OASIS (AL-FAYOUM)

Al-Fayoum, the oasis, is considered neutral territory in the desert tribal wars. The elder chief emphasizes this tradition when Santiago confronts him with his vision of a future in which enemy warriors invade Al-Fayoum. There are two reasons for the neutrality of the oasis: first, both sides of the war have oases to protect, and so both share a strategic weakness, and, second, the oasis contains civilians, many of whom are women and children. Al-Fayoum therefore

symbolizes neutrality, but also life and prosperity. The literal contrast between the stark surrounding desert and the rich and fruitful oasis echoes the contrast between the prevailing warfare of the desert and the safe haven of the oasis. The oasis demonstrates that a common morality exists among the tribes, even in the face of violent warfare. A neutral territory, which is respected by all parties, promises that there can be some measure of peace achieved on earth.

THE EMERALD TABLET

The Emerald Tablet is one of **alchemy**'s historic trade secrets. It is a single emerald engraved with instructions for completing the Master Work of all alchemy: the creation of the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life. These original instructions were therefore simple enough that they could be written on the surface of a single stone. The alchemist explains to Santiago that alchemists later began to distrust simplicity, and so they created other texts and compiled other information about the Master Work. In Santiago and the alchemist's time period, many strive after the goal of the Master Work, but with no success. The Emerald Tablet is thus a symbol of the value of simplicity. The novel repeatedly emphasizes the value of trusting one's self and focusing on one's Personal Legend, and these projects require that one value simplicity: if a Personal Legend becomes more important than anything else, then one's priorities and problems become less complex and confusing. The novel also suggests that truth is reached by listening to one's heart, another process that values simplicity. Learning does not require extensive study, but rather quiet observation. Repeatedly this novel emphasizes the ways humans create barriers to their own success, particularly when they value complexity over simplicity, as in the history of The Emerald Tablet.

Apart from its lesson of simplicity, in itself the Emerald Tablet also symbolizes the interconnectedness of all things. It is a distillation of all of alchemy into one unified object, just as the Soul of the World is the distillation of all life and creation into one thing.

THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT

Throughout the novel, the Pyramids of Egypt are held in Santiago's mind as his end goal, as they mark the location of his treasure. Therefore, the pyramids symbolize his Personal Legend. The pyramids are veiled in mystery because of the incredible effort it takes to reach them across the desert, and because they are a stunning feat of engineering and human accomplishment. They also symbolize the difficulty of Santiago's quest. They seem like a surreal dream, due to their physical distance and awe-inspiring appearance, which hovers before Santiago for months and months. Ultimately the pyramids are not the end point of Santiago's quest, however, and he must return to a familiar place, the **abandoned church**, to find his treasure. Therefore, the pyramids come to symbolize all that Santiago experiences along the way toward the end goal of his Legend. The distances he travels, the people he meets, and the lessons he learns on his journey are all a part of his spiritual quest. The pyramids represent the part of his Personal Legend that involves exploring the unknown and the foreign.

THE ABANDONED CHURCH

The abandoned church in Spain forms bookends for the novel—Santiago dreams of his treasure while sleeping in the collapsed church at the beginning of the book, and he returns to the church to find his treasure at the very end. The abandoned church symbolizes the value of the familiar and of home. Santiago ultimately did not have to travel any physical distance to find his treasure, which was in his own homeland, but the journey itself was as much a part of his quest as was the final result. The importance of this journey is symbolized by his initial distant goal of **the Egyptian Pyramids**.

Santiago's realization that his treasure is in a place he knew all along marks the final stage of his self-development in the book. Early in the novel he is consumed with wanderlust, but by the book's end he realizes the value of returning home. Coelho suggests that both the journey and the destination are valuable, and the abandoned church symbolizes this idea.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper One edition of *The Alchemist* published in 2014.

Prologue Quotes

"I weep for Narcissus, but I never noticed that Narcissus was beautiful. I weep because, each time he knelt beside my banks, I could see, in the depths of his eyes, my own beauty reflected." "What a lovely story," the alchemist thought.

Related Characters: The Alchemist, The Lake (speaker), Narcissus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

The prologue of this novel features an updated version of the Narcissus myth from Ancient Greece. In the original myth, Narcissus drowns in the lake where he is addicted to gazing at his own reflection. In this version, the lake mourns his death because it lost the opportunity to admire its own

reflection in Narcissus's eyes. The alchemist's approval of this story and its placement at the beginning of the novel seem to function as a cautionary tale for the reader. The legend of Narcissus has been a cautionary tale since antiquity, warning against overly indulgent self-love. This new version seems to also point out that self-love can be more pervasive than we might expect. Our reactions and emotions might be guided by selfishness and self-focus. Paul Coelho cautions his reader against looking for his or her own reflection in this story, as the lake looks for her own reflection in Narcissus.

The protagonist of the novel, Santiago, is an everyman figure. Many readers might see themselves and their need to fulfill their personal legends reflected in his story. However, the reworked Narcissus myth warns that a reader might be too quick to look for his or her reflection and thus lose sight of larger lessons the story might teach.

"You came so that you could learn about your dreams," said the old woman.

"And dreams are the language of God. When he speaks in our language, I

can interpret what he has said. But if he speaks in the language of the soul,

it is only you who can understand."

Related Characters: The Fortune-teller (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago has a recurring dream of a child guiding him to a treasure near the Egyptian Pyramids, and he decides to seek the help of a fortune-teller in interpreting the dream. The fortune-teller offers these cautionary words when Santiago requests her interpretative skills. This quote introduces several ideas that will be important throughout the novel. First, there is the active role that God and spirituality play in this book. Santiago does not operate without divine guidance. He is continually presented with omens that appear either through the physical world or in the words of other people. The fortune-teller believes Santiago's dreams, which a reader might suppose to be naturally occurring, to be direct information from God. This places the reader into a context in which information from God is real and important to the plot of the novel. Furthermore, this information from God can come in one of two forms: human language or the language of the soul. The fortune-teller does not explain the language of the soul, but it reappears in the novel.

Later in the novel, Santiago learns, through his study of the philosophy of alchemy, how to connect with the world and other beings. He describes this connection at first in terms of a "universal language of the soul." This language of the soul transcends regular language boundaries, as well as the boundaries of species and elements. Through this universal language, Santiago is able to understand the wind and the desert, hawks and the horse he rides. Because this universal language is linked to God in this early passage, the connection between all things is seen as a spiritual connection throughout the novel.

"It's a book that says the same thing almost all the other books in the world say," continued the old man. "It describes people's inability to choose their own destinies. And it ends up saying that everyone believes the world's greatest lie." "What's the world's greatest lie?" the boy asked, completely surprised. "It's this: that at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie."

Related Characters: Santiago, Melchizedek (the Old Man) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago meets an old man in the village square who questions him about the book he is reading. The old man complains about the book because he feels that it propagates the "world's greatest lie." This is not a unique problem, as this passage explains. According to this old man, many books rely on and express this same lie: that humans do not choose what happens to them in their lives. This analysis of books inside a book helps show the reader the main goal of Coelho's novel. Unlike many other books, Coelho is claiming that his book *The Alchemist* will not continue to spread the world's greatest lie. The main idea of this novel is the opposite: that we can choose what happens to us in our lives.

Throughout the book, multiple characters discuss the separate ideas of free will and fate. Although this is a fictional novel, these ideas as discussed by characters are

intended to be relevant to the reader's life. This is clear because of the universal language used in this passage and other passages like this. The old man uses "us" and "our" to refer to all humans collectively. He says that "everyone" believes the world's greatest lie, partially because of books they've read. This moment helps all readers stop and reflect on the fact that they are reading a book and that they have probably been influenced by other books they've read. Coelho hopes to encourage his readers, just as the old man hopes to encourage Santiago, to examine whether they believe this great lie. (And, of course, whether or not they believe it is a lie at all, or just an oversimplification.)

"Everyone, when they are young, knows what their Personal Legend is. At that point in their lives, everything is clear and everything is possible. They are not afraid to dream, and to yearn for everything they would like to see happen to them in their lives. But, as time passes, a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their Personal Legend."

Related Characters: Melchizedek (the Old Man) (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

During the old man's conversation with Santiago in the village square, the old man introduces the idea of a Personal Legend into the novel. In the world of the book, a Personal Legend is a dream or wish that a person chooses to fulfill. This often fails, as the old man explains in this quote, because people lose faith in their ability to fulfill their Personal Legends as they grow up. The old man speaks in universal terms in this passage, explaining a transformation that is relevant to "everyone." Everyone understands his or her Personal Legend at a young age, which is a key idea because following one's Personal Legend requires the ability to dream and believe in one's dreams, an ability common in children. However, this passage explains that most adults lose this ability with time because they no longer believe their dreams can become reality. This is a familiar concept, in literature and life beyond Coelho's novel. Children are often understood to be idealistic and adults realistic. Children think anything is possible and adults focus on smaller, more achievable goals. Many would say this is part of growing up.

The old man in this passage criticizes this aspect of growing up because he sees that a child becoming a "realistic" adult also means giving up on his or her dreams, and, therefore, the chance to fulfill his or her Personal Legend. Growing up and becoming worldly is the "mysterious force" that changes a person and stops them from dreaming.

"To realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation."

Related Characters: Melchizedek (the Old Man) (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

The old man, Melchizedek, speaks these words to Santiago during their discussion about fulfilling one's Personal Legends. This quote adds a new level of importance to fulfilling one's Personal Legend. Initially, Melchizedek describes the value of fulfilling one's Personal Legend in personal terms. Everyone has a dream as a child that is lost as the person ages. But fulfilling this dream is the thing that will make that person happiest and most satisfied. That is a personal reason for pursuing one's dreams. To describe the pursuit of a Personal Legend as an "obligation" adds another important point to the discussion, which is the idea developed throughout this novel that fulfilling a Personal Legend benefits all the world, not just the individual.

This novel focuses on the idea of the Soul of World, which describes the unity that exists among all things: humans, animals, and nature. This is a spiritual understanding of the world known as *pantheism*, the belief that God and the universe are synonymous. Because of this interconnectedness, any one action or being impacts all others. The Soul of the World aids Santiago on his quest, and as he learns about the interconnectedness of all things he becomes closer to fulfilling his Personal Legend. Therefore, when someone fulfills his Personal Legend, he is in tune with the Soul of the World, which is described as being nourished by happiness. When Santiago fulfills his Personal Legend, he in turn nourishes the Soul of the World.

Here I am, between my flock and my treasure, the boy thought. He had to choose between something he had become accustomed to and something he wanted to have.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago learns about Personal Legends from Melchizedek, who encourages him to seek his by going on a quest to find the treasure from his dreams. In order to do so, Santiago must abandon his flock of sheep and the country in which he has lived his whole life. In this passage, Santiago sees the choice that is before him. He is split between staying with his flock, which represents familiarity and safety, and pursuing his treasure, which represents the unknown, but also the possibility of even greater happiness and fulfillment. This choice shows that the road toward one's Personal Legend is not always easy. Risks must be taken and difficult choices must be made.

In order to make this choice and pursue his Personal Legend, Santiago cannot be afraid of the unknown. This fear could prevent him from taking a risk that would result in his happiness. Santiago later sees other characters, such as the Crystal Merchant, who are prevented from pursuing their Personal Legends because they are afraid of taking this very same risk. The distillation of Santiago's specific choice (between his sheep and his treasure) into one between the familiar and the unknown shows that this is a universal choice that humans face. At some point in our lives, we will each need to choose to take a risk in order to open up new possibilities for happiness.

> "In order to find the treasure, you will have to follow the omens. God has prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that he left for you."

Related Characters: Melchizedek (the Old Man) (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Melchizedek gives Santiago several pieces of advice that will serve him well throughout the novel. The character of Melchizedek fills an archetypal role in literature: that of the elder giving helpful information to the protagonist who is setting out on a quest or facing a set of challenges. One of these pieces of advice is described in this passage: Santiago should pay attention to omens that he will receive from God. This idea again speaks to the role that God and spirituality play in this novel. God, who in the novel seems to be one and the same as the Soul of the World (and not associated with any particular world religion), actively guides Santiago. This shows that God is benevolent and engaged in human lives. One example of God guiding humans is through dreams, which the fortune-teller tells Santiago are from God. Another example is the omens. The pursuit of one's Personal Legend may be easy to forget about and ignore, but once the quest begins one will receive help along the way.

This idea of God helping humans is not specific to Santiago's quest. Melchizedek could have said "God has prepared a path for you to follow," but instead he says "God has prepared a path for everyone to follow." This may seem like a subtle distinction, but it continues a larger idea of the novel that the themes and ideas presented here are relevant to the reader's life, as well as all human lives. The topics of fulfilling one's dreams and relying on God's guidance are broadly applicable.

> He didn't consider mending the hole—the stones could fall through any time they wanted. He had learned that there were certain things one shouldn't ask about, so as not to flee from one's own destiny. "I promised that I would make my own decisions," he said to himself.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago is alone in Tangier after a man, whom he thought was going to help him, robs him. Some of Santiago's remaining possessions include Urim and Thummin, the fortune-telling stones. He decides to ask the stones for advice about what to do next. As he begins using the stones, however, one of them falls through a hole in his pocket. This seemingly chance event cause Santiago to pause and reflect on his actions. He remembers promising Melchizedek that he would make his own decisions. Because of this promise,

he decides in this passage that he is okay with losing the stones, and that he won't use them to tell him what to do. In addition to keeping his promise, Santiago is here motivated by a new realization: that sometimes too much information isn't a good thing.

The idea that knowing too much can be a bad thing is further developed with the character of the camel driver, who tells Santiago about seeking information about the future from many fortune-tellers. From these experiences and from his hardships, the camel driver learned to live in the present without fear about the future. Some things are meant to be, and fear won't change the future. Santiago's choice to not use Urim and Thummin shows a similar type of thinking. Santiago doesn't want to shy away from his future if he learns that it will be difficult. He sees the value of ignorance here. If Santiago doesn't ask too much about the future, it is because he trusts God to guide him and values making his own decisions.

❝ Once again he saw that, in that strange land, he was applying the same lessons he had learned with his sheep. "All things are one," the old man had said.

Related Characters: Melchizedek (the Old Man) (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Despite his own hardships, Santiago takes time to help a candy seller in the Tangier marketplace assemble his market stall. Santiago and the candy seller don't speak the same language, and yet Santiago is struck by how well the two are able to understand each other despite this language barrier. He realizes this feeling of communication without words is familiar to him because he was able to communicate with his sheep in the same way. Throughout the novel, Santiago's sheep are a grounding point for him. He learned valuable information from his sheep simply by caring for and observing them. This shows the value of simplicity--an important lesson of the novel. Santiago didn't need to do anything dramatic or fancy to learn some of the most important life lessons. He simply needed to care for his sheep and observe the world.

Santiago's connection with the candy seller and with his sheep presents the idea of a universal language. This novel develops the connections among all things in the universe, and one example of this connection is the idea of a universal language that transcends all barriers. Melchizedek also spoke of this interconnectedness of all things, which Santiago remembers in this passage as the phrase "all things are one"--essentially an encapsulation of the idea of a pantheistic universe.

Part Two Quotes

❝ "Well, why don't you go to Mecca now?" asked the boy. "Because it's the thought of Mecca that keeps me alive. That's what helps me face these days that are all the same, these mute crystals on the shelves, and lunch and dinner at that same horrible café. I'm afraid that if my dream is realized, I'll have no reason to go on living."

Related Characters: The Crystal Merchant, Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

The Crystal Merchant takes Santiago under his wing when the boy is penniless in Tangier. By working for the Crystal Merchant, Santiago is able to replenish his money and eventually continue his quest. At the same time, Santiago learns about the difficulties that arise when one is trying to realize his Personal Legend. The Crystal Merchant exemplifies one common problem: he knows what he wants, but he is too afraid to go after it. In his case, he has grown so dependent on having a dream that it has become part of his character. He cannot imagine a life in which he has made his dream a reality. The Crystal Merchant's tragic situation is articulated in this quote through the language he uses to describe his life. From "mute crystals" to the "horrible café," it is clear that the Crystal Merchant is unhappy with his situation in life. The *dream* of fulfilling his Personal Legend sustains him, so he cannot imagine fulfilling it.

Throughout this novel, fear is repeatedly discussed. Fear of the unknown, fear of death, fear of taking a risk—all of these fears are presented as obstacles to be overcome. It seems that fear is the primary obstacle to fulfilling one's Personal Legend, and in a novel that is part fictional story and part non-fictional analysis of the topic of dream fulfillment, discussion of the obstacle of fear that Santiago faces and that all humans face when trying to fulfill their dreams is

key.

"You have been a real blessing to me. Today, I understand something I didn't see before: every blessing ignored becomes a curse. I don't want anything else in life. But you are forcing me to look at wealth and at horizons I have never known. Now that I have seen them, and now that I see how immense my possibilities are, I'm going to feel worse than I did before you arrived. Because I know the things I should be able to accomplish, and I don't want to do so."

Related Characters: The Crystal Merchant (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago has several ideas for how the Crystal Merchant can improve his business, including installing an outdoor display case for his products and serving tea at his shop. The Crystal Merchant is resistant to these ideas because his character is guided by fear of the unknown and of change. The Crystal Merchant explains his emotional reaction to Santiago in this passage. Before Santiago appeared in his life, the merchant was satisfied with the way things were. This satisfaction was because he could not see the possibilities for change in his life. The merchant does not explain this, but it seems connected to the novel's earlier idea of the world's greatest lie. Many people end up believing that they cannot change their lives or control their fate.

Santiago appears, however, and shows the Crystal Merchant that he *can* change his life. Santiago is guided by God, and he has chosen to follow his Personal Legend. Perhaps because of his faith in people's abilities to change their lives and follow their Personal Legends, he automatically shows this possibility to others. The Crystal Merchant is still afraid of making changes, but he no longer believes the world's greatest lie. Therefore, he is stuck between his fear of change and the change he now believes possible. As a result, he is more unhappy than he was before. Awareness of one's Personal Legend isn't easy. It is easier to just live in ignorant bliss.

"Hunches," his mother used to call them. The boy was beginning to understand that intuition is really a sudden immersion of the soul into the universal current of life, where the histories of all people are connected, and we are able to know everything, because it's all written there. "**Maktub**," the boy said, remembering the crystal merchant.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker), The Crystal Merchant

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago meets a camel driver as he is traveling with a group of tribespeople across the desert. This man is another figure in Santiago's life that provides him with guidance and life lessons. The camel driver tells Santiago to observe the desert and learn from it. Santiago feels a strong connection with the desert, despite not having grown up in it like many of the travelers. He feels this sense of connection is because he is able to tap into the unity among all things, which is the Soul of the World and the source of a universal language. These different terms are used throughout the novel to get at the same idea.

This passage explains the Soul of the World as a "current of life" that contains everything in the universe, past, present, and future. Accessing this "current of life" clearly enables one to access everything and know everything. This overwhelming power normally appears in human lives as intuition, or "hunches." It is not quantifiable or explainable, but it is a key truth in the world of this novel.

The Soul of the World is also connected in this passage to another key idea of the book—the idea that some things are "written." Here, Santiago reflects that this connection is possible because everything about the world is "written," meaning that everything in the world is generated from one source, God. This involves an idea of predestination and free will--that God knows what will happen, but that humans still have to choose whether to follow what is "written" or not.

"We are afraid of losing what we have, whether it's our life or our possessions and property. But this fear evaporates when we understand that our life stories and the history of the world were written by the same hand."

Related Characters: The Camel Driver (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

The camel driver teaches Santiago several important ideas as they travel together. Although he is different from Melchizedek and the Alchemist, his ideas are connected to the teachings of these other two men. The main focus on the camel driver's character is the role of fear in human lives. His hardships from his past taught him to overcome fear over losing life, possessions, and property. In this quote, the camel driver explains why no person should fear loss. Fear stems from a misunderstanding of the world as a place in which humans can lose or gain things through our own failures or successes. Instead, the camel driver advocates for a worldview in which everything that happens is written by God. This idea reappears in the novel with the Crystal Merchant, who liked to say "maktub," meaning "it is written," and later with Fatima, who has faith that Santiago will return to her if their relationship is "meant to be."

The idea of "maktub" is not placed at odds with free will or the need to actively pursue one's Personal Legend. Instead, it is used as a way of thinking that provides comfort, reassurance, and peace. If one holds the worldview that all things are "written," as the camel driver explains here, one can accept the future rather than feeling fear and anxiety about it. Good and bad possibilities are put into perspective by this worldview because they are both the work of the same creator.

> "The alchemists spent years in their laboratories, observing the fire that purified the metals. They spent so much time close to the fire that gradually they gave up the vanities of the world. They discovered that the purification of the metals had led to a purification of themselves."

Related Characters: The Englishman (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago first learns about alchemy from the Englishman who has devoted his life to the study of its practices, and then he continues to learn about it from the Alchemist throughout the novel. The Englishman focuses on studying alchemy carefully and systematically, whereas the lessons of the Alchemist focus on simplicity and studying the world. From the Alchemist, Santiago learns ideas about alchemy in a broad context. In other words, the principles of his study are applicable to many different contexts. Alchemy teaches a person how to purify metals and how to understand chemical elements, but these processes can also be applied to life, and Santiago learns how to purify himself and how to understand the basic principles of the world.

Alchemy is used as a powerful metaphor in the novel and in Santiago's life. He does not work directly with chemical elements or seek the philosopher's stone, but he uses the same practices of alchemy in new contexts. He learns how to value simplicity and learn by observation, as the alchemists in this passage do when "observing" and "discovering." In this quote, one of the first about alchemy in the novel, the reader is asked to see alchemy as a symbol for life, or a spiritual path. Those who practice purifying elements, purify themselves.

> "I learned that the world has a soul, and that whoever understands that soul can also understand the language of things. I learned that many alchemists realized their destinies, and wound up discovering the Soul of the World, the Philosopher's Stone, and the Elixir of Life. But, above all, I learned that these things are all so simple that they could be written on the surface of an emerald."

Related Characters: The Englishman (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 85-86

Explanation and Analysis

The Englishman asks Santiago to describe what he has learned from the alchemy books he loans the younger man during their journey. In this passage, Santiago explains what he has learned with an answer that surprises the Englishman. While the two have read the same texts, they have learned very different things. The Englishman values the complexity of alchemy and the hard work it requires. Santiago, on the other hand, values its simplicity and universality. The examples he provides in this quote all focus on universal ideas that make connections across places,

cultures, and activities. Santiago speaks of the "Soul of the World" which is accessible to anyone, the success of alchemists in achieving their Personal Legends, and the simplicity of these ideas, which could be contained on the Emerald Tablet. The Englishman values the exclusivity of alchemy, believing it only yields its secrets to those who put in hard work. Santiago sees alchemy as broadly applicable and inclusive. His interpretation of alchemy ties into the idea used throughout the novel that the practices of alchemy can be applied in many areas of life.

The Emerald Tablet contains universal ideas that require little explanation, as evidenced by the small amount of writing needed to communicate them. This shows that the more universal and applicable an idea, the simpler it often is.

> At that moment, it seemed to him that time stood still, and the Soul of the World surged within him. When he looked into her dark eyes, and saw that her lips were poised between a laugh and silence, he learned the most important part of the language that all the world spoke—the language that everyone on earth was capable of understanding in their heart. It was love. Something older than humanity, more ancient than the desert. Something that exerted the same force whenever two pairs of eyes met, as had theirs here at the well. She smiled, and that was certainly an omen—the omen he had been awaiting, without even knowing he was, for all his life. The omen he had sought to find with his sheep and in his books, in the crystals and in the silence of the desert.

Related Characters: Fatima, Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95-96

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago meets a young woman at the well in the oasis while he and the Englishman are searching for the Alchemist. Santiago's reaction to meeting this young woman, whose name is Fatima, is immediate and overwhelming. Without even speaking to her, he understands that he loves her, and he sees their lives as intertwined. He's suddenly sure that she is what he was "awaiting, without even knowing he was, for all his life." This passage uses some of the familiar clichés of "love at first sight," including that for Santiago "time stands still," and that he understands love for the first time in his life when he looks on Fatima. Furthermore, Coelho doesn't ever show us this moment from Fatima's point of view--it's just assumed that she too falls in love with Santiago, because it is "destiny."

There are also elements of this "love at first sight" passage that play off the unique themes of this novel. Santiago seems to access the Soul of the World and the universal language in this moment, and sees connections among all things because the source of these connections is love. Humanity and the world are united and connected by love, which Santiago is able to understand in the moment he falls in love. Fatima's smile is described as an "omen," and Santiago has been on the lookout for omens from God to guide him on his journey. Because Fatima's smile is an omen, this connects the fateful meeting between these characters to the idea that God is preparing a path for Santiago. Their meeting is "written," just as all of Santiago's other experiences and lessons have been.

> "And I am a part of your dream, a part of your destiny, as you call it. That's why I want you to continue toward your goal. If you have to wait until the war is over, then wait. But if you have to go before then, go on in pursuit of your dream. The dunes are changed by the wind, but the desert never changes. That's the way it will be with our love for each other...Maktub," she said. "If I am really a part of your dream, you'll come back one day."

Related Characters: Fatima (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Fatima's reaction to Santiago's declaration of love relies on her understanding of the world as a place in which events, meetings, and actions are "written" by the hand of God. Her faith allows her to tell Santiago to go on his quest. Like the camel driver, she is not afraid of the future because she trusts in the idea of "maktub," or "it is written." She uses this exact same language, despite not having interacted with the other characters in the novel, such as the Crystal Merchant, who hold this worldview of God writing all that happens. Because Fatima repeats this same lesson, it is made abundantly clear that this is one of the central themes of the novel.

Fatima's expression of her faith that Santiago will return if "it is written" uses descriptive language of nature. She says that "the dunes are changed by the wind, but the desert never changes." This metaphor shows that while the surface

of something might change, the identity of a thing cannot be changed. By comparing her and Santiago's love to the desert, she shows that their love is deeper than the surface level, which can change in appearance. This nature metaphor also reinforces the idea that important life lessons can be learned from observing the natural world. Fatima models her behavior on a truth she learned while observing the desert.

Of course, it's also worth noting that Santiago and Fatima's love is supposed to be "deep and unchanging" because of destiny, not because they have actually gotten to know each other. Furthermore, Fatima only really exists as a part of Santiago's destiny--she has no real agency or "dream" of her own in the novel.

"The camel driver understood what the boy was saying. He knew that any given thing on the face of the earth could reveal the history of all things. One could open a book to any page, or look at a person's hand; one could turn a card, or watch the flight of the birds... whatever the thing observed, one could find a connection with his experience of the moment. Actually, it wasn't that those things, in themselves, revealed anything at all; it was just that people, looking at what was occurring around them, could find a means of penetration to the Soul of the World.

Related Characters: Santiago, The Camel Driver

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104-105

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago has a vision of an army invading the oasis and decides to explain this to his friend the camel driver. He also explains that seeing hawks flying and fighting above the desert made him feel as if he were in touch with the Soul of the World. His vision seemed to be the result of this connection with the Soul of the World, as if by accessing the Soul of the World, Santiago was able to access knowledge of the future. The camel driver understands this idea because he believes that everything in the world is connected. This quote explains the consequences of that connection: if everything is connected, any one thing contains, or allows access to, all things. Therefore, it is enough to study a small corner of the world if one wants to learn about the whole world. The camel driver gives several examples of a small corner of the world that could provide information about the whole world—a page of a book, a hand, a card, the flight of birds. These things are all very simple. This shows that the more universal a concept, the simpler it is. (This concept also applies to alchemy, as the book makes clear elsewhere.)

"You must understand that love never keeps a man from pursuing his destiny. If he abandons that pursuit, it's because it wasn't true love... the love that speaks the Language of the World."

Related Characters: The Alchemist (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12412

Explanation and Analysis

The alchemist speaks these words to Santiago when Santiago again feels torn between staying in one place and continuing his quest toward his Personal Legend. This choice between staying in the oasis with Fatima or continuing across the war-torn desert echoes his choice earlier in the novel between his flock of sheep and his treasure: one is familiar and comforting, the other unknown and risky. The alchemist helps Santiago with this choice by offering this advice, which says that true love doesn't get in the way of pursuing one's Personal Legend. This is credited to the fact that "true love" "speaks the Language of the World." This Language of the World is the universal language that unites all beings and things in this novel. If one can access the universal language, one can transcend boundaries. Therefore, true love is defined as a connection that transcends boundaries and connects lovers across time and space through the universal language.

Even though Santiago has to leave to pursue his Personal Legend, he and Fatima are connected through the Soul of the World. If Santiago didn't leave, it would be because he was afraid of losing Fatima and their love. But only a temporary love can be guided by fear. According to the alchemist, fear of loss and separation is irrelevant to true love, because true lovers are connected through the universal language wherever they go.

"If what one finds is made of pure matter, it will never spoil. And one can always come back. If what you had found was only a moment of light, like the explosion of a star, you would find nothing on your return." The man was speaking the language of alchemy. But the boy knew that he was referring to Fatima.

Related Characters: The Alchemist (speaker), Fatima, Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

As Santiago and the Alchemist set off across the desert on the final leg of Santiago's quest, the Alchemist can tell that Santiago is sad to be leaving Fatima behind. He offers these words of reassurance, which encourage Santiago to trust in the power of his connection with Fatima, which will outlast time and distance if it is a "pure" and lasting love, not just "a moment of light." This is one of the most explicit examples in the novel of alchemy as a metaphor for life's events. The Alchemist is speaking about a principle of alchemy—that pure matter cannot be contaminated—but Santiago understands this concept to be a metaphor for an idea about love—that pure love cannot be contaminated by time and separation. Throughout the novel, the study and practice of alchemy is used as a model for living an examined life of self-improvement and learning.

The language of the Alchemist's metaphor uses not only the elements of alchemy, but observations about the world. He describes a more fleeting love as "a moment of light, like the explosion of a star." The explosion of a star is very bright, but its brightness and energy means that it also expires quickly. By applying this observation to love, the Alchemist is arguing that a bright love is temporary, but the pure love between Santiago and Fatima will be long-lasting.

"People are afraid to pursue their most important dreams, because they feel that they don't deserve them, or that they'll be unable to achieve them. We, their hearts, become fearful just thinking of loved ones who go away forever, or of moments that could have been good but weren't, or of treasures that might have been found but were forever hidden in the sands. Because, when these things happen, we suffer terribly."

"My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy told the alchemist one

night as they looked up at the moonless sky.

"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself."

Related Characters: The Alchemist, Santiago, Santiago's Heart (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

As Santiago travels, he begins to learn in a new way: by listening to his own heart. Santiago has already learned from observing his sheep and the desert. He has seen that observation of one thing can yield universal truths, because it allows the observer to access the Soul of the World, in which all things are connected. Therefore, it has already been established that Santiago will be able to learn large life lessons through the simple practice of observing his own heart. The heart is personified and given a voice, and in this passage it speaks to Santiago and explains its motivations and feelings.

Santiago learns by listening to his heart that it is afraid. This fear, like other examples of fear in the novel, gets in the way of achieving one's Personal Legend. Ironically, the heart's fear is of precisely that: of not achieving its Personal Legend, of failure. Thus the heart prevents its owner from taking risks that might lead to suffering. When Santiago shares this information with the Alchemist, the Alchemist interprets it into a broader life lesson: that fear of suffering is worse than suffering itself. This is an idea that is familiar beyond the pages of *The Alchemist*. Often anxiety about the future is worse than actually experiencing that future. This life lesson teaches that humans need to control their fear, so that it doesn't control them.

But that the hand had a reason for all of this, and that only the hand could perform miracles, or transform the sea into a desert…or a man into the wind. Because only the hand understood that it was a larger design that had moved the universe to the point at which six days of creation had evolved into a Master Work. The boy reached through to the Soul of the World, and saw that it was a part of the Soul of God. And he saw that the Soul of God was his own soul. And that he, a boy, could perform miracles.

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago and the Alchemist are taken hostage by warring tribesmen, but the Alchemist offers Santiago's powers in exchange for their freedom. The leader, impressed, wants to see the power of Allah change a man into the wind. The only problem is that Santiago doesn't know how to change himself into the wind. Santiago addresses the elements around him before finally directly addressing God, or the Hand that Wrote All. In this moment, Santiago is able to understand the "Hand" in a new way, as explained in this passage. Santiago sees that the hand of God has reasons behind all its actions, which might be impossible to understand without seeing the "larger design" of the world and the future that the hand can see.

In this moment, Santiago understands that the Soul of the World and the Soul of God are one and the same, and because he is part of the Soul of the World, he is also part of the Soul of God. Santiago has access to the future through the Soul of the World, and anything that God can do, Santiago can do through the Soul of the World. This passage empowers every single being because every single being is part of the Soul of the World, according to the pantheistic kind of spirituality explained in the novel. And, as explained here, being joined to the Soul of the World gives one access to everything that God has. All it takes is for Santiago to be able to perform miracles is to know that he *can*. It was a lack of belief and knowledge that stopped him using this power before. This power is accessible to anyone.

"You're not going to die. You'll live, and you'll learn that a man shouldn't be so stupid. Two years ago, right here on this spot, I had a recurrent dream, too. I dreamed that I should travel to the fields of Spain and look for a ruined church where shepherds and their sheep slept. In my dream, there was a sycamore growing out of the ruins of the sacristy, and I was told that, if I dug at the roots of the sycamore, I would find a hidden treasure. But I'm not so stupid as to cross an entire desert just because of a recurrent dream."

Related Characters: The Leader of the Refugees (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 167-168

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago does not find his treasure buried at the pyramids, but as he is digging he is attacked by refugees of the tribal wars who think he is looking for something. When the leader of the refugees finally understands why Santiago was digging in the sand, he openly mocks Santiago and explains in this quote that he had a parallel dream to Santiago's recurring dream of treasure. The leader of the refugee's dream uses specific details from Santiago's past, information he could not otherwise know--such as the tree growing through the abandoned church. Unlike Santiago, he dismisses the importance of this dream and calls Santiago "stupid" for following a dream. The difference between this man and Santiago is that one can see and understand omens and the other cannot acknowledge the possibility that an omen might be presented to him--or, in broader terms, that one man was willing to throw everything away to pursue his Personal Legend, and one was not.

Santiago's faith in God and in the idea of "maktub" is what keeps him following his recurring dream even in the face of great trials. The leader of the refugees is a clear foil character for Santiago--an example of what he would have become had he not pursued his treasure. In the face of this man's derision and doubt, Santiago's persistence and faith are all the more clear. Santiago recognizes the scene from the man's story and understands that his treasure is not at the pyramids--it was back at home all along.

Epilogue Quotes

He thought of the many roads he had traveled, and of the strange way God had chosen to show him his treasure. If he hadn't believed in the significance of recurrent dreams, he would not have met the Gypsy woman, the king, the thief, or…"Well, it's a long list. But the path was written in the omens, and there was no way I could go wrong," he said to himself.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker), The Thief (the Young Man), Melchizedek (the Old Man), The Fortune-teller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago finds his treasure at the abandoned church where his story began. Therefore, his treasure was physically near him when he first set off in search of his Personal Legend, and yet, as this quote shows, his treasure was emotionally and experientially distant from him. Although he need not have traveled great distances to find his treasure, it's clear

that he needed to travel through experiences and grow as a person to receive his treasure. Santiago thinks of the places he has visited, the people he has met, and the experiences he has had along the way. These would not be part of his life without the roundabout pathway by which he arrived at his treasure.

Santiago points out that he took the path he did because of the omens from God, who clearly intended him to travel and have the experiences that he had. As Coelho makes clear, it's not only the end result of achieving one's Personal Legend that matters, but the process of following omens and learning along the way. This is a key passage because it shows that Santiago's Personal Legend is not simply to find treasure, which is something that can be measured by material standards--his Personal Legend was to go on *a quest toward* his treasure through which he grew, learned, and changed.

> The wind began to blow again. It was the levanter, the wind that came from Africa. It didn't bring with it the smell of the desert, nor the threat of Moorish invasion. Instead, it brought the scent of a perfume he knew well, and the touch of a kiss—a kiss that came from far away, slowly, slowly, until it rested on his lips. The boy smiled. It was the first time she had done that. "I'm coming, Fatima," he said.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker), Fatima

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

The novel ends with Santiago's quest complete, his treasure claimed, and his promise to return to Fatima in the oasis. This quote highlights the connection between Santiago and Fatima across continents. Their connection is embodied in the wind that blows from Africa to Spain. This language reinforces the idea that Santiago and Fatima are connected through the Soul of the World, which connects all things. The wind is a medium that passes Fatima's scent and kiss to Santiago, because the wind is likewise part of the Soul of the World.

Santiago ends the novel with a smile and a whispered promise because the Soul of the World has maintained his connection to Fatima. The Soul of the World, one and the same as the Soul of God, is a force of goodness and love in the universe. Just as this good force helped Santiago to achieve his Personal Legend, so too does it wish for the lovers to be reunited. The message of this novel overall, then, is one of positive empowerment. Despite the trials he faced, Santiago was never alone. He succeeded, even though the location of his treasure was different than he expected. He didn't have access to the full picture as God could see it, but he persisted in following the omens, which led to his success. This ending of this novel promises this possibility of fulfillment for everyone, by reminding the reader of the force of good at work in the world.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

An alchemist reads a short story in a book while traveling with a caravan. The story begins with the familiar legend of Narcissus, in which a young man is so in love with his own beauty that he stares at his reflection in a lake until he falls into the water and drowns. In this version of the story, however, the narrative continues. The lake is weeping after Narcissus's death, and the goddess of the forest appears to ask the lake why she weeps.

The prologue provides a complimentary anecdote to the story that reveals more about Paulo Coelho's priorities in writing this novel than it does about the plot of the main narrative. The Greek myth of Narcissus is a familiar tale about the destructiveness of vanity and self-love, and here it introduces the idea of the novel itself as a modern kind of "parable"—a simple, relatable story used to develop a moral lesson. The alchemist appears as a character here, but he won't be back until much later in the book.

The goddess of the forest assumes that the lake weeps for Narcissus's death because the lake could best contemplate his beauty, as he knelt by the water's edge. The lake says that it did not know Narcissus was beautiful. The lake weeps for the loss of Narcissus because the lake could see its own beauty reflected in Narcissus's eyes. "What a lovely story," says the alchemist.

This fresh ending to an ancient tale provides the reader with the sense of Coelho's book as updating old themes for a new generation. It also shows the reader that is easy to look for one's own "reflection" in anything, indicating that this novel might be a kind of parable, but it should not be read strictly as a "self help" book.

PART ONE

Santiago is a young shepherd boy in the Andalusian region of Spain. At dusk one day, he arrives at an **abandoned church**. The roof has caved in, and a sycamore tree grows up through the open space. Santiago spends the night in the church with his **flock of sheep**. He lays his jacket down on the floor, and uses the book he's reading as a pillow to rest his head on.

Santiago, the novel's protagonist, is introduced in humble settings. His identity as a shepherd quickly connects him to many familiar religious narratives, especially parables from the Bible. The abandoned church will reappear at the end of novel, though it seems entirely unexceptional here.

Santiago awakes early the next morning before dawn. He has had a dream—one he has had before—but he wakes up before the dream has ended. He notices that his **sheep** awake at the same time as he does. Santiago reflects that they are used to him and have adjusted to his schedule, and then he realizes that perhaps it is the other way around, and *he* has adjusted to *their* schedule.

Santiago's observation of his sheep and his realization that he may have adopted their schedule is important, as the novel emphasizes awareness of the natural world. Throughout the story, Santiago learns from observation and attentiveness, and his sheep are the first symbol of this.

Santiago wakes up the last of his **sheep**—he knows them each by name. Sometimes he reads aloud to his sheep, and often speaks to them. For the past few days he has spoken to them about only one thing: the daughter of a merchant who lives in a nearby village. Santiago met the girl the year before when he sold his sheep's wool to her father.

Santiago is introduced as a character with a simple life and simple desires—he loves his sheep, and he is in love with a young woman. He will later abandon both these commitments, however, when he is given the chance to pursue his "personal legend."

Santiago remembers the events of the year before. The shop was busy when he went to sell wool to the merchant, so the man asked him to wait. As Santiago waited, he read. The merchant's daughter approached him and asked him about his reading. She wondered how he, a shepherd, learned to read. Santiago told her that he learned in school, and she wondered why he is a shepherd if he knows how to read. Santiago tried to avoid answering this question. Instead, he told her stories about his travels and, as time passed, he wished he could give up traveling and stay with her in her village.

Santiago's attraction to the merchant's daughter seems mostly due to her reaction to him—she was impressed by his ability to read, and was willing to listen to his stories. Santiago's profession, which requires him to constantly travel with his sheep, is a romantic one, but it also gets lonely sometimes. We get the sense that Santiago relishes his freedom, but part of him also wants to settle down and build stronger connections with other people.

Now, approximately one year later, Santiago will return to the same village. He is excited and looks forward to seeing the merchant's daughter. He reflects that shepherds, like other wandering men, will always eventually find a town where someone persuades them to give up their wandering lifestyle.

Santiago reflects that he is not alone in his desire to settle down and be with another person. This happens to most wanderers: the desire to stop wandering alone. Santiago seems to recognize the universal nature of his own life.

Santiago reflects on the contentment of his **sheep** as he travels, thinking that they, unlike him, never have to make decisions. The sheep appear to only be concerned with food and water. Santiago thinks that if he suddenly became a monster and decided to kill his sheep, they would be surprised and would not expect this change. This is because they trust him and are no longer wild. Santiago is surprised at these strange thoughts, and wonders if they're caused by the unrest of his recurring dream.

Santiago's thoughts about his sheep, although they strike him as strange, reflect his growing awareness of the impact he has on their lives, and therefore the responsibility he has for them. The sheep are ultimately presented as simple creatures, while Santiago is started to experience more complex thoughts and desires. Soon it will be time for him to leave them.

Santiago is grateful for his jacket, which keeps him warm, although at the height of day the heat is intense and he is sorry that he has to carry his jacket. However, in the cold evenings he is glad to have it. He reflects that one needs to be prepared for change. Like the jacket, Santiago has a purpose to his existence. He believes his purpose is to travel, and he has spent two years exploring the Andalusian terrain. Santiago learned to read because he attended a seminary until he was sixteen. His parents wanted him to become a priest, which would've been a great accomplishment for a boy from a simple family. As Santiago studied to become a priest, however, he was not happy, so he summoned the courage to tell his father that instead of being a priest, he wanted to travel.

Santiago's jacket shows that a blessing and curse may be one and the same, depending on the circumstances. This is one of the many small "lessons" Coelho ruminates over in the course of the novel. Santiago's original plan to be a priest shows that he has always been a spiritual and thoughtful person, but he ultimately turned away from organized religion and instead sought fulfillment through traveling. Coelho seems to value this kind of spiritual journeying over simply following a prescribed path. This backstory is also important because it accounts for Santiago's ability to read.

Santiago's father told Santiago that people from all over the world pass through their village. And while these visitors seem to be seeking new things, the world elsewhere is no better than, or even very different from, what exists in their home village. Santiago replies that he wants to see castles in towns were other people live, not just the castle that's next door. Santiago's father says that visitors to the village wish they could stay forever, and Santiago replies that he, in his turn, would like to see the places where the visitors come from.

Santiago's discussion with his father is basically Coelho's presentation of the two arguments for traveling versus finding a home and staying there. Santiago's father feels that he has found the best place in the world, whereas Santiago seeks variety for its own sake. It may be that he will return home in the end, but he has to see other places before he can conclude that his village is truly where he belongs.

Santiago's father presents the obstacle of money. He says that among their people, the only ones who travel are shepherds—so Santiago decides to be a shepherd. The next day, Santiago's father gives his son three Spanish gold coins. He tells Santiago to use them to buy his flock and to take the opportunity to travel, and he gives the boy his blessing. Santiago sees in his father his own desire to travel, but his father has never been able to fulfill this dream because he has had to struggle to survive as a farmer.

Santiago's father offers the idea of becoming a shepherd as a financially viable way for Santiago to travel. He seems like a good and supportive father, as he actively assists Santiago in pursuing his dream. Santiago feels that his father partly does this because he himself wished to have the experiences that he is able to grant his son—his father wants to live vicariously through Santiago.

As Santiago travels, he thinks back on the conversation he had with Santiago's father, and it makes him happy. He has already seen many castles and met many women, and he owns a jacket, a book, and a **flock of sheep**. These things are part of living out his dream. He feels that he could not have found God in the seminary. The world is massive, the possibilities are endless, and he relishes every opportunity to discover new things.

Santiago's experience of traveling has been a spiritual one for him. He feels he could not have discovered God in the traditional place of the seminary, but he did because he followed his own dream. This worldview reflects Coelho's own life, as he famously experienced a spiritual awakening on a 500-mile pilgrimage walk in Spain.

Santiago reflects that his **sheep** don't recognize these possibilities. Because the sheep focus only on food and water, they don't see that the places through which they travel are new every day. Santiago thinks that perhaps all people have this tendency. Since he met the merchant's daughter, he has not thought of new women, but only repeatedly of her. Santiago does not want to consider the possibility that some other shepherd has already asked for her hand in marriage. He thinks that the possibility of a dream being realized is what keeps life interesting. He also remembers that in the next town he'll reach, Tarifa, there is an old fortune-teller who is able to interpret dreams.

Santiago learns valuable lessons by observing his sheep (and this in itself is one of Coelho's lessons—that one can become wise merely by observing life). One of these lessons is that both sheep and people are often focused on their basic needs and unwilling to think about the bigger picture. Santiago realizes this tendency in himself because of his unwillingness to acknowledge that the merchant's daughter may have moved on while he's been away. Believing in dreams requires thinking that they might come true.

Santiago arrives in Tarifa and meets the fortune-teller, who leads him from her living room to a back room where she practices her craft. The room has a table, two chairs, and an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The two sit down and the woman begins to pray. To Santiago, it sounds like a gypsy prayer. Santiago has already met gypsies in his travels, and he has heard that others do not trust gypsies. Rumors about gypsies say that they make pacts with the devil and kidnap children. Many are frightened of them, but Santiago calms his fears by noting the fortune-teller's Sacred Heart of Jesus. The woman examines Santiago's hands. Santiago is nervous and his hands begin to shake. He says to the woman that he didn't come here for her to read his palm. He considers paying her and leaving without learning anything about his dream.

Santiago seeks out the fortune-teller because he has had a recurring dream and wishes to learn more about the meaning of the dream. Santiago's wariness of the fortune-teller's gypsy roots reveals that despite his exposure to the world, he is still fearful of the strange and different. He believes some of the racist superstitions he has heard, and is nervous around the woman, but is comforted by evidence of her Christianity. Santiago's own faith seems ambiguous, although he believes in God and the omens God gives him throughout the novel. Santiago is clearly a spiritual individual, and his background is Christian.

The fortune-teller says that she knows that Santiago came to learn about his dream. She adds that dreams are the language of God, so when God speaks through a dream in "our language," she can interpret it. But if he speaks in the language of the soul, only the dreamer can understand it. Santiago decides to take a chance on the fortune-teller either way. He tells her that he's had the same dream twice and he describes it. In the dream, he is in a field with **his sheep**, and a child appears. The child plays with the sheep, but suddenly she takes Santiago by the hand and they are both transported to **the Egyptian Pyramids**. Santiago pauses in his telling to see if the fortune-teller knows what the Egyptian Pyramids are. At the Egyptian Pyramids, he continues, the child says to Santiago, "if you come here, you will find hidden treasure." Just as she is about to show Santiago the location of the treasure, he wakes up.

The fortune-teller distinguishes between dreams that God shares in "our language" versus dreams that are in the language of the soul. This introduces the concept of a "language of the soul" into the novel. Later this will develop into the idea of the Soul of the World, a connection between all people and things, and a kind of universal language that everything can understand. Santiago's dream features the Egyptian Pyramids as the site where he'll find treasure. Throughout his quest, the pyramids symbolize Santiago's end-goal—the long sought, but foreign ideal of his treasure. The exact location of the treasure is still veiled in mystery, adding another challenge to Santiago's quest.

The fortune-teller is silent for a while. Then she says that she is not going to charge Santiago anything for her consultation, but that if he finds the treasure, she wants one-tenth of the total in payment. Santiago laughs and asks her to interpret the dream. She says that first he must swear that he will keep his promise about the treasure and her payment. Santiago swears that he will. The fortune-teller asks him to swear again while looking at the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Then she says that the dream is in the language of the world, so she is able to interpret it. She says Santiago must go to **the pyramids in Egypt**. There, he will find a treasure that will make him a rich man.

The fortune-teller's clever request for payment reveals her shrewdness, but also her sympathy for Santiago. If he doesn't succeed, she does not want to ask too much of a poor shepherd—but if he does find his treasure, she will receive a sudden windfall. She is basically betting on him and the success of his spiritual journey. The fortune-teller's interpretation of the dream is rather obvious, and provides no new insight into the quest. In the context of this novel, dreams often reveal important information about life.

Santiago is annoyed. He feels that he didn't need the interpretation to realize this about his dream. The fortune-teller says that the interpretation of the dream was difficult, because the simple things in life are the most extraordinary. It takes wisdom to realize and understand simplicity. Santiago asks her how he should get to Egypt, but the fortune-teller says that she only interprets dreams, and doesn't deal in making them a reality. Santiago asks her, "but what if I never get to Egypt?" The woman says that in that case, "I don't get paid."

Santiago is frustrated that he consulted a professional to learn nothing new. The fortune-teller's argument introduces the theme of the value of simplicity. Throughout the novel, simplicity is overlooked by the world at large, but shown to have remarkable value in Santiago's experiences. This also will later connect to the idea of alchemy, and the lessons of the alchemist.

Santiago leaves disappointed. But he remembers that he has several practical things to do, so he goes to the market for food and he trades his book in for a different one. It is a hot day, and he sits on a bench in the plaza. Santiago knows a lot of people in Tarifa. He likes traveling because he always makes new friends. If you see the same people every day, Santiago thinks, these people become a part of your life, and people who are a part of your life want you to change, and when you don't change, others become angry. All people seem to have a clearer idea of how others should lead their lives. Santiago decides to wait until the sun sinks lower before taking **his flock** back to the fields.

The novel here briefly moves from the more allegorical, spiritual realm to the practical errands Santiago needs to complete in town. Coelho's book is like a parable, but it is also a novel set in a time and place, and Santiago faces many "real-world" concerns. Here Santiago reflects on the perils of becoming too close with other people, because close relationships develop a mutual desire to change the other person. Santiago prefers the solitary life of a shepherd and clearly looks down on others when they are judgmental.

Santiago starts to read from the book he bought. As he reads, an old man sits down next to him and tries to talk to him. The old man points to people in the plaza and asks what they're doing. The boy answers that they're working, and he tries to put the old man off by pretending he's busy reading. In fact, Santiago is imagining shearing his **sheep** in front of the merchant's daughter. He is also trying to remember good stories to tell her. Most of his stories come from books, but he plans to tell them as if he has experienced them himself.

The old man who joins Santiago is innocuous at first glance, and Santiago finds his interruption annoying. Santiago is fantasizing about the merchant's daughter, although he will soon abandoned such fantasies when he sets off to search for his treasure. His impending quest shows that his interest in the girl is mostly superficial, and even vain, as he is mostly attracted to the fact that she likes his stories.

Meanwhile, the old man asks if he might have a sip of Santiago's wine. The old man then asks about the book Santiago is reading. Santiago feels he should be respectful of the elderly, so he holds his book out to the man. The old man looks at the book and then says it is an important book, but also an irritating book. Santiago is surprised that the old man knows how to read, and that he has already read the book. The old man says that this book says the same thing as almost all the other books in the world. It says that people are unable to choose their Personal Legends, and that everyone believes the world's greatest lie. Santiago wonders what the world's greatest lie is. The old man says that the world's greatest lie is that we do not control what happens to us.

The old man's interpretation of Santiago's book introduces the main idea of the novel: the importance of Personal Legends, and the fact that so many people give up on their Personal Legend (one's goal or joy in life) rather than pursue it to its end. Many sacrifice their Personal Legend because they don't believe they control their own lives, and so they settle for something inferior and never reach their full potential. Coelho takes a rather "existentialist" approach here, arguing that we are entirely in control of our existence, and that if we are unfulfilled or unhappy, it is our own fault.

Santiago says that this has never happened to him. He did not want to be a priest, and so he became a shepherd instead. The old man says that being a shepherd is a much better fit for Santiago, because he likes to travel. Santiago notices the old man's clothing. He looks like an Arab, which is not unusual, as Africa is only a few hours from Tarifa. The boy asks where the old man is from, and the old man says that he was born in Salem. Because he does not know where Salem is, but also does not want to appear ignorant, Santiago asks the old man what Salem is like. Then he asks the old man what he does in Salem. The old man laughs and says that he is the king of Salem.

The old man is now starting to be presented as a supernatural or mythical figure, as he has impossible knowledge but first appears in a humble and nondescript form. This is another ancient archetype that Coelho uses—that of the god (or wizard, etc.) disguising himself in order to trick others or point out their prejudices. The old man's introduction as the King of Salem does not mean anything to Santiago, but this is a reference to a Biblical character, Melchizedek, who is a priest in the Book of Genesis, and who is later referenced by Saint Paul.

The old man introduces himself as Melchizedek, and he asks Santiago how many **sheep** he has. The boy says that he has enough sheep. Melchizedek says that he can't help Santiago if he feels that he has enough sheep. Santiago grows irritated, because he doesn't feel that he needs help. He asks for his book back, and says he needs to leave. The old man says that if Santiago gives him one-tenth of his sheep then he will tell him how to find his hidden treasure. Santiago remembers his dream, and suddenly everything becomes clear. He realizes that the fortune-teller and the old man may be working together to get money from him.

Santiago believes that he is already controlling his destiny, and he is happy with his life as a shepherd, but Melchizedek suggests that he does not see how much more potential he has. Santiago must desire more from his life if he is going to actually make a change and pursue his Personal Legend. Santiago immediately suspects a plot between Melchizedek and the fortune-teller—he is a dreamer with a tendency towards the spiritual, but he is also wise in the harsh ways of the world.

Melchizedek picks up a stick and begins to write in the sand. As he moves, something bright is revealed underneath his cloak. Santiago is momentarily blinded by its shine before Melchizedek quickly covers it again. Melchizedek writes in the sand the names of Santiago's father and mother, and the name of the seminary Santiago attended. Santiago also reads the name of the merchant's daughter, which he hadn't even known before, among other things that no one would be able to know about himself.

Melchizedek writes private information about Santiago in order to prove to him that he has access to information far beyond what a regular man might have learned from the fortune-teller in a plot to rob Santiago. This scene echoes another Biblical passage, in which Jesus writes something in the sand and then scratches it out—something private or mystical that is not recorded.

Santiago realizes that Melchizedek is indeed a king, and he wonders why a king would talk with him, a shepherd. Melchizedek says that the most important reason is that Santiago has succeeded in discovering his Personal Legend. Santiago asks what a Personal Legend is, and Melchizedek explains that it's the thing you have always wanted to accomplish. When you're young, you're certain of what this thing is. But at some point in everyone's life, your convictions about your dream begin to vanish, as you think you won't be able to realize your Personal Legend. This doesn't make much sense to Santiago.

A key part of the "Personal Legend" for Coelho is the idea that a child knows it—it is something innate that a person is born with. It is only the outside world and the expectations or actions of others that cause the child to forget or give up on his or her Personal Legend. These scenes are not only Melchizedek teaching Santiago, but also Coelho explaining his theories to the reader in simple and universal terms.

Melchizedek explains that the one great truth is that no matter who you are or what it is you do, your true desires come from the soul of the universe. Having a true desire is the same as having a mission. Santiago questions whether this is true, if all one wants to do is travel or marry a merchant's daughter. Melchizedek says yes, and that the Soul of the World is nourished by happiness. Therefore, our only real obligation is to realize our destiny. When you want something, the universe helps you to achieve it, Melchizedek concludes. Melchizedek and Santiago sit in silence for a while.

Melchizedek expands on this spiritual system of the universe—everything is connected to an entity called the Soul of the World. This is not presented as a Christian kind of god, but rather as a vaguely pantheistic idea. Pantheism is the belief that the universe is identical with divinity, or that God is basically synonymous with everything that exists—there is no god distinct from nature, as god is present throughout nature. This also brings up the ideas of destiny and happiness, as the Soul of the World is supposedly nourished by happiness, so it helps people achieve what they want. It prescribes a "destiny" for people in their Personal Legends, but then it is up to their free will whether they achieve this destiny or not.

Melchizedek asks Santiago why he tends **a flock of sheep**. Santiago answers that it is because he likes to travel. Melchizedek points out a baker in the plaza. He tells Santiago that that man had also wanted to travel. He has not yet done so, because he does not realize that people at any time in their life should follow their dreams, which they're always capable of achieving.

Melchizedek explains the idea of a Personal Legend with an example—essentially a parable within the parable of the novel itself. Santiago is traveling, as he wishes to do, but the baker is not, even though he has the same desire. Thus Santiago is already more fulfilled than many other people are, even though he has not yet achieved his own Personal Legend.

Santiago says the man should also have decided to become a shepherd. Melchizedek explains that the baker chose his profession because it would give him more recognition than being a shepherd would. Parents would rather see their daughter marry a baker then a shepherd. Santiago thinks sadly of the merchant's daughter. Melchizedek explains that other people's opinions of his profession eventually became more important to the baker than his Personal Legend.

Melchizedek explains that one thing that holds many people back from realizing their desires is their concern for what others think of them. A person might choose a more respectable career over the one they actually want, because they place too much value on how the world sees them, and don't have enough confidence or courage to fulfill their Personal Legends.

Santiago asks Melchizedek why he is telling him all this. Melchizedek says that Santiago was trying to realize his Personal Legend, but now he's at the point of giving up. Melchizedek says that sometimes he appears in the form of a solution or a good idea at a crucial moment, just when somebody is about to give up on his or her Personal Legend. He tells the story of appearing to a miner in the form of a stone. The miner had been mining for emeralds, and just when he was about to give up, Melchizedek appeared as a stone that rolled up to the miner's foot. The miner threw the stone away in frustration, with such force that it broke open another stone, revealing the emerald inside.

Santiago is at a critical point in the journey toward his own Personal Legend. He is ready to give up because he doesn't believe in his recurring dream, and he knows that it is easier to continue the life he already has than to seek a distant treasure with no guarantee of success. Melchizedek's story of the miner shows that persistence is key in achieving a Personal Legend. It is not always an easy task, but one is not alone. For Santiago, Melchizedek himself is there as a supernatural guide to help reveal his Personal Legend.

Melchizedek says that people learn early in their lives what their Personal Legend is, but maybe that's also why they also give up on it early. Santiago reminds the old man that he had mentioned his treasure. Melchizedek says that if Santiago wants to learn about his treasure, he will have to give him one-tenth of his **flock**. Santiago wonders if could instead offer the old man one-tenth of his treasure. The old man says that if Santiago starts out by promising something he doesn't even have, he won't want to keep working toward getting his treasure. Santiago tells Melchizedek about his promise to the fortune-teller. The old man says that it's good that Santiago has learned that everything in life has a price. He tells Santiago to meet him in the square at the same time the next day, with one-tenth of his flock, and then he will tell Santiago how to find his treasure. Melchizedek leaves.

It is easy to scorn or give up on the dreams of youth when one gets older, which may be why so many easily abandon their Personal Legends (or so Melchizedek suggests). Melchizedek warns Santiago about promising something he doesn't have, as turning his treasure from a dream into an obligation might keep Santiago from seeking out the treasure in the first place. Melchizedek then leaves Santiago with a very tough decision—whether or not to sacrifice his livelihood and pursue his Personal Legend, even without receiving any more information about his treasure. Santiago must take a risk—and Coelho is clearly challenging his readers to examine themselves and take a similar risk.

Santiago tries to read, but he is no longer able to focus on his book. He goes up to the bakery and buys a loaf of bread, and while he does so he considers telling the baker what the old man said about him. But he decides to leave things as they are. If he said anything, the baker would spend time questioning the profession that he has worked hard to achieve. Then Santiago wanders to the city gates, towards the ticket window where people buy tickets to Africa. He knows that Egypt is in Africa. The man behind the window asks if he can help Santiago, but Santiago says "maybe tomorrow." The ticket seller says to his assistant that Santiago must be just another dreamer without enough money to travel.

Santiago considers revealing that he knows the baker's desire to travel, but sees that this will not encourage the man, but will only make him more unhappy about his present life. Santiago is not Melchizedek, and doesn't have the right knowledge or wisdom to guide someone toward his own Personal Legend—Santiago only has agency over his own decisions, not those of others. The ticket seller's reaction to Santiago is to dismiss all dreamers who want to travel. He sees the baker's plight in many people.

Santiago remembers his **flock**, and decides he should go back to being a shepherd. On his way back to his sheep, he climbs the stone ramp that leads to the top of the city's castle. From that point, he can see Africa in the distance, and he can see almost the entire city. Santiago reflects that he is divided between pursuing his treasure and staying with his flock. He must choose between something he is familiar with and something unknown that he wants to have.

Santiago feels committed to his flock—he recognizes that they trust and need him, and he has also grown and learned many things just by living alongside his sheep and observing them. This is essentially Coelho highlighting the choice between staying with the familiar and taking the risk of pursuing one's dream—a choice everyone faces.

Santiago also considers the merchant's daughter, but reflects that she does not depend on him like **his sheep** do, and perhaps she doesn't even remember him. Santiago reflects that he left his father and mother behind, and they have gotten used to this change. His sheep, too, will get used to being left behind. The boy feels jealous of the wind that is blowing because it is free, but he realizes that there is nothing to hold him back from pursuing his dream, and from having the same freedom.

Earlier Santiago had tried to avoid thinking about the possibility that the merchant's daughter had forgotten him. Now, however, he is being more realistic about her, suggesting that the pull of his treasure is growing stronger. Coelho makes his theory explicit here in the "lesson" Santiago learns from the wind—no matter one's situation (according to Coelho) there is always the freedom to pursue a dream.

The next day, Santiago meets Melchizedek at noon, and brings him six **sheep**. He tells Melchizedek that he has already sold all his other sheep to his friend, and that his friend had always dreamed of being a shepherd. Melchizedek says that this is called "the principle of favorability." In other words, it is an example of beginner's luck. There is a force that wants Santiago to realize his Personal Legend, and so it encourages him early on with the taste of success.

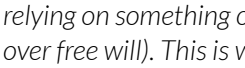
Coelho makes even common concepts like "beginner's luck" into aspects of one's spiritual journey—it's not "luck" at all, but a "force" encouraging us to follow our Personal Legends. The force that wants Santiago to realize his dream does not control Santiago's will, but it does impact the world around him.

Santiago asks Melchizedek where the treasure is. Melchizedek says it is in Egypt near **the pyramids**, which Santiago already knows. Melchizedek tells him that to find the treasure he will have to follow omens prepared by God. Santiago remembers that his grandfather had taught him about some omens. Melchizedek opens his cape and shows Santiago that he wears a breastplate of gold covered with precious stones. Santiago again realizes that Melchizedek is really a king.

Melchizedek presents more concrete evidence of his mystical nature, and his gold breastplate also brings up the idea of "treasure" once more. Omens are used throughout this novel to communicate information and provide warning. God (or the Soul of the World, or a "force") speaks to characters through dreams and through omens.

Melchizedek offers Santiago a white stone and a black stone from the breastplate. He tells him that the stones are called **Urim and Thummim**. The black stone signifies "yes," and the white stone "no." These fortune-telling stones will help Santiago read the omens. However, Melchizedek cautions Santiago to try to make his own decisions, and not just rely on the stones. Melchizedek offers him final words of advice, saying that he must not forget that everything he deals with is only one thing and nothing else. He must not forget the language of omens. And most importantly he must not forget to keep following his Personal Legend until it is achieved.

Urim and Thummim are another Biblical reference—they are mentioned in the Old Testament as a means of divination or fortune telling, although it's never specified what kinds of objects they are, or even if they're objects at all. In this novel they symbolize the opportunity to reach for certainty and foresight, but only through relying on something outside one's self (essentially choosing "fate" over free will). This is why Melchizedek cautions Santiago about using the stones—because making his own decisions is so important. Ultimately it seems like Melchizedek gives Santiago the stones more as a temptation to test his willpower than as an aid to help him on his quest.



Melchizedek also leaves Santiago with a story. In the story, a shopkeeper sends his son to learn the secret of happiness from the wisest man in the world. The boy travels through the desert until he comes upon a beautiful castle where the wise man lives. Inside the castle are many people, including tradesman and musicians, and there are people talking happily among platters of delicious food. The wise man is speaking to all of these visitors. When the boy has a chance to speak to him, the wise man listens attentively to the boy's question, then he suggests that the boy look around the palace for two hours and then return to him. He asks that while the boy looks around, he also carry a spoon full of oil without letting the oil spill.

Melchizedek's story has clear parallels with Santiago's life, and is yet another parable within a parable. Both the boy in the story and Santiago are beginning a quest, and along the way they will learn from a wise man (currently Melchizedek himself, but Santiago will later encounter the alchemist who will serve as a mentor). The wise man in the story teaches the boy by letting him experience situations for himself and by setting him with a challenge. His instructional style mirrors that of the alchemist, as we will see later.

The boy does this and when he returns to the wise man, he reports that he did not observe any of the wonders of the palace, because his only concern had been to keep the oil from spilling. The wise man tells him to go back and observe the marvels of his world. The boy does so and this time he observes everything, but in the process of observing he accidently lets all the oil spill from the spoon. The wise man says that the only advice he can give him is that the secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world, but to also never forget the oil in the spoon. Santiago says nothing in response to the story, as he understands its message: even though he may travel, he should never forget about his **sheep**.

The moral of the story of the wise man and the boy is that success and happiness exist in a difficult-to-achieve balance between new and old, between adventure and commitment. Santiago interprets this story to mean that his life as a shepherd is an important aspect of the success of his quest. Throughout his quest, Santiago appreciates the lessons he learned from his sheep, and he will again be pulled between the desire to continue traveling on and the desire to stay put.

Melchizedek, the king of Salem, sits on the wall of an old fort in Tarifa that afternoon. He is accompanied by the **sheep**, who are uneasy with their new owner. He watches a ship leaving the port and knows he will never see Santiago again. He hopes that Santiago will be successful in his quest, even though he knows that the boy will quickly forget his name. He wishes that the boy would remember him and speak of him as Melchizedek, the king of Salem. He looks to the skies, a bit ashamed, and speaks to his God, saying that he knows this admission to be the "vanity of vanities."

This is an interesting departure from a narrative that generally follows only Santiago and his inner thoughts. Indeed, it's almost a comic interlude, as it shows that even Melchizedek, the holy man and seemingly immortal, supernatural character, wishes he were given more credit and fame.

Santiago arrives in Morocco, Africa, and he goes to a bar in Tangier. He sees men smoking from a giant pipe, and other people following ritual prayers, kneeling and touching their foreheads to the ground. Santiago dismisses this as a practice of infidels. He feels ill and alone, and he doesn't speak Arabic, the language of this country. He tries to concentrate on getting to his treasure. Santiago now has a substantial amount of money from the sale of his **sheep**, and he thought a lot about omens as he was crossing the strait to Africa. He reflects that his sheep were always aware of omens in the natural world, like signs that there was water or danger nearby. He reflects that if God can lead sheep so well, he must also be able to lead men.

Santiago is an outsider in Morocco and is completely overwhelmed, but he is also comforted by evidence that God plays a role in his life and will be able to guide him through the appearance of omens. The level of trust shown by his sheep reminds Santiago to also trust in God to lead him. His sheep, in their simple acceptance and trust, are happy and peaceful. This "lesson" is yet another Biblical reference, particularly to the famous Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"), and Jesus is described as "the good shepherd."

A young man approaches Santiago and speaks in Spanish. Santiago tells him that he needs to get to the **Egyptian Pyramids**, and he asks the young man if he will serve as his guide. He offers to pay him to do so. The young man points out that to cross the Sahara desert, one needs money, and he needs to know beforehand if Santiago has enough money. Santiago takes out his money and shows it to the young man. The owner of the bar comes over and exchanges a few angry words with the young man. The young man tells Santiago that they should leave, but as they do so the owner grabs Santiago and begins to speak at him angrily. Santiago doesn't know what's happening, but he trusts his new friend. The young man tells Santiago that they could get to the pyramids by tomorrow, but they'll have to buy two camels.

Santiago was suspicious of the fortune-teller and Melchizedek, but he is naïve in his dealings with this young stranger, and he shows his own youth and inexperience here. He hands the total sum of his money over to this young man and believes that he will help him get to the pyramids. He does not understand the interaction with the owner and thinks of the English-speaker as his "new friend." Santiago also clearly has no concept of geography, or how far Egypt is from Morocco—otherwise he would be immediately suspicious of the claim that they could reach the pyramids the next day.

Santiago and his new friend walk together through the busy streets of Tangier. Santiago never takes his eyes off the young man, who is holding his money, but suddenly the most beautiful sword he has ever seen distracts him. After a moment, he turns to his new friend to ask him to inquire about the price of the sword, but in that moment he realizes that the young man has vanished with his money.

Santiago is not entirely naïve about the young man, but he still trusts his own ability to keep an eye on his "friend." It's notable that an object of great beauty is what distracts him. Later on he will be equally "distracted" and smitten by the sight of Fatima.

Santiago is feeling sorry for himself as the sun sets, reflecting that between sunrise and sunset of the same day, he went from being a successful shepherd to being stranded with no money in a country where he does not speak the language. The marketplace has emptied.

Santiago reacts to this setback by feeling sorry for himself and focusing first on what he has lost. At this point in the novel, he has not yet learned how to live in the moment and value simplicity.

Santiago reflects that with his **sheep** at least he was happy, but now he feels bitter and distrustful of all people, because he has been betrayed. He opens his pouch to see what of his possessions are left. All he has are his book, his jacket, and the stones **Urim and Thummim**. He looks at the stones and feels relieved, because perhaps he could sell them and buy a return ticket to Spain. He reflects that the owner of the bar had been angry because he had been trying to tell him the young man was a thief.

Santiago's bitterness about the person who robbed him then extends to the world as a whole, showing the persuasiveness of negative thinking. Urim and Thummim appear comforting in this moment, as symbols of certainty in a moment of uncertainty. Santiago does not consider the risk of relying on the stones as he relied on the thief.

Santiago decides to try an experiment with the stones. He asks if the old man's blessing is still with them, and takes a stone from his pouch. It is the stone that means "yes." He asks if he is going to find his treasure, but when he reaches into his pouch, **Urim and Thummim** fall through a hole in the pouch. He realizes that this may be an omen. Santiago picks up the stones to put them back in the pouch, although he feels that if he lost the stones it wouldn't be too significant, because he has promised to make his own decisions. He feels more confident now, and looks around the Tangier marketplace realizing that it is not a strange place, but a new one, and that opportunities to experience new places are what he has always wanted. He tells himself that he is an adventurer looking for treasure.

Santiago begins to use the stones for fortune-telling to reassure himself, but when one stone slips through his pocket he awakens to the implications of what he is doing: he is relying on the stones rather than thinking for himself, as he had promised to do. With this realization, Santiago turns from negative thinking to positive thinking (and perhaps this is why Melchizedek gave him the stones in the first place). This small epiphany makes him realize the potential of his situation rather than the negative aspects of it.

Santiago is suddenly shaken awake. He had fallen asleep in the middle of the marketplace, and it is now the next day. Instinctively, he looks around for his **sheep** before realizing where he is. He walks through the marketplace, stopping to help a candy seller assemble his stall. The smile on the candy seller's face reminds the boy of the mysterious old king. The boy realizes that the candy seller is doing the very thing that he wants to do with his life. Like Melchizedek, Santiago can now sense whether a person is near or far from his Personal Legend just by looking at him.

Santiago wakes up and sees Morocco in a new light, a literal echo of the mental "waking up" he just experienced. This new positive attitude inspires him to act with kindness, and his encounter with the candy seller seems to restore Santiago's faith in the world. The candy seller is generous, and is also apparently happy because he has realized his Personal Legend.

The candy seller offers Santiago a sweet in exchange for his help. Santiago reflects that he and the candy seller were able to understand each other perfectly, although they do not speak the same language. He thinks that there must be a language that does not depend on words, the same language he used to communicate with his **sheep**. He sees that even though he is in a strange land, he is applying the same lessons he learned from his sheep. He remembers that Melchizedek had said, "all things are one."

The connection Santiago forms with the candy seller transcends the language barrier that made Santiago feel like an outsider the previous day. Santiago realizes another lesson learned from his sheep: that all life is connected and there is a language that does not depend on words. This idea of a universal language continues to be important in the novel.

That same morning, a crystal merchant awakes feeling anxious. He has had the same shop for thirty years, but it's located at the top of a hill and not easily accessible to customers. Now it is too late to change this, even though his shop is becoming less and less popular. He feels, however, that he has no control over this. He spends the morning observing the infrequent comings and goings outside his shop window. Just before lunchtime, a boy stops in front of his shop.

The crystal merchant and his concerns are introduced before Santiago encounters him. This foreshadows the role that Santiago will play in his life—bringing prosperity back to his crystal shop. The crystal merchant has fallen prey to the "world's greatest lie" (according to Melchizedek/Coelho)—that he has no control over his life.

Santiago comes into the crystal merchant's shop, seeing a sign that says several languages are spoken there. Santiago offers to clean the crystal glassware in the window, because its current appearance does not encourage anyone to buy it. He asks, in exchange, for something to eat. The crystal merchant does not respond, and so Santiago takes out his jacket and uses it to start cleaning the glasses. When he is done, the crystal merchant invites him to have something to eat.

Santiago comes into the crystal shop because his language is spoken there—perhaps this sign is the type of omen he is looking for. Santiago hopes that his work and motivated attitude will act as a type of universal language and persuade the merchant to give him a job.

As they eat, the crystal merchant tells Santiago that he didn't have to do any cleaning, because the Koran requires him to feed any person in need. Santiago wonders why, then, the crystal merchant let him do the work? The crystal merchant feels that the work helped both of them to clear their minds of negative thoughts. After they've eaten, the crystal merchant offers Santiago a job in his store. Santiago says that he can work for the rest of the day and all night, and clean every piece in the shop, but in return he needs enough money to get to Egypt.

The crystal merchant explains his religious understanding of generosity, which is informed by his Islamic faith. His idea about cleaning away "negative thoughts" makes him seem like a similarly thoughtful, spiritual person to Santiago—someone who will understand him. He is generous with Santiago and offers him a job, despite the failing condition of his shop. Santiago clearly still assumes that his journey will be short, and he is impatient to start.

The crystal merchant laughs and says that even if Santiago cleaned his crystal for the entire year, and earned a good commission on every piece, he would still have to borrow money to get to Egypt. There are thousands of miles of desert between Tangier and Egypt. There is a pause, and Santiago's soul falls silent. He wishes he had died and that everything would end forever. All the joy the crystal merchant had seen in the boy vanishes. The crystal merchant offers to give Santiago enough money to get back to his own country. Santiago replies that he'll work for the crystal merchant. After a long silence, Santiago says that he needs extra money to buy some **sheep**.

The crystal merchant's words are a painful reality check for Santiago. His hope in an easy solution to his problem is lost. The dramatic hopelessness that Santiago faces in this moment echoes his pessimistic feelings upon losing his money. He now seems to have decided that he was too reckless in choosing to seek his treasure, and he only wants to go home and be a shepherd again. After his initial "beginner's luck," he is now facing many challenges in pursuing his Personal Legend.

PART TWO

Santiago has now been working for the crystal merchant for almost a month. It is not the kind of job that makes him happy, but he sticks with it because the merchant treats him fairly. Santiago calculates that if he continues to work for the merchant, it will take a whole year to earn the money to buy **a flock of sheep**. He then comes to the crystal merchant with an idea. He proposes building a display case for the crystal that could be placed outside to attract the attention of people passing by. The merchant worries that the case will get bumped and the crystal will get broken.

Santiago is not satisfied with working for the crystal merchant and the slow pace of income. He is naturally a curious and innovative person, as evidenced by his willingness make a drastic life change and his desire to travel and see new things. The crystal merchant, by contrast, maintains his stubborn commitment to how he has always done things—he is clearly unsatisfied in terms of his Personal Legend.

The crystal merchant tells Santiago that business has improved, and soon Santiago will be able to return to his **sheep**. Why, he wonders, would Santiago ask any more from life? Santiago says that they must follow omens. The merchant understands what the boy is saying, because Santiago's very presence in the shop is an omen. The crystal merchant asks Santiago why he wants to get to **the pyramids**. Santiago says only that he wanted to visit because he's heard so much about them. He tells the crystal merchant that he must have never had dreams of travel.

The crystal merchant works as a character foil for Santiago, showing the pitfalls of hanging onto the past and not moving forward. Santiago is innovative and restless for change here, but he has also been sidetracked from his own Personal Legend. He is unwilling to admit his interest in the pyramids to the merchant, which shows that he is unwilling to admit their importance to himself.

Two days later, the crystal merchant speaks to Santiago about the display. He says that he does not like change. He asks Santiago why he thinks they should build the display. Santiago says that he wants to get back to his **sheep** faster and that they should take advantage of the situation, as luck is on their side. He calls that the "principle of favorability," or beginner's luck. The crystal merchant tells Santiago that, in the Koran, God gave every person just five obligations to satisfy. They are: believing in God, praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, and being charitable to the poor. Tears come to the crystal merchant's eyes as he speaks about the Prophet (Muhammad, but unnamed here).

The crystal merchant doesn't like change, and he knows that Santiago's ideas will change his business and disrupt what has become the norm for him. Santiago now starts quoting Melchizedek and passing on his words to others (here discussing the "principle of favorability"). The crystal merchant is clearly a devout Muslim and passionate about his faith, as he cries just talking about the Prophet Muhammad.

Santiago asks what the fifth obligation is. The crystal merchant says that the fifth obligation is a pilgrimage to Mecca. He says that when he was young, all he wanted was to make enough money so that he could travel to Mecca. While he has been working in his shop, he has met travelers on the way to Mecca, and some are much poorer than he.

The fifth obligation of Islam presents a problem for the merchant, and we see why he purposefully left it off his list. The merchant now reveals what seems to be his own Personal Legend (traveling to Mecca), while also admitting that he could pursue it, but hasn't yet.

Santiago wonders why the crystal merchant does not go to Mecca now. The crystal merchant explains that it's the thought of Mecca that keeps him alive. He is afraid that if his dream is realized, he'll have no reason to go on living. He says that he just wants to dream about Mecca, and not actually achieve his dream. He is afraid it would be a disappointment to reach the holy city, and therefore prefers to simply dream. But he gives Santiago permission to build the outdoor display.

The idea of Mecca has become such a key force in the merchant's life that he is afraid of removing its influence by actually fulfilling his dream. This anxiety about fulfilling a dream and worrying that it won't meet his expectations is preventing the merchant from realizing his Personal Legend.

Two more months pass and the display brings many people into the crystal shop. Santiago estimates that if he works for six more months he can return to Spain and by sixty sheep. Now Egypt is just a distant dream for him, and he has become happy in his work. He remembers that Melchizedek said you must always know what it is you want, and Santiago feels that he knows what he wants and is working toward it. He's proud of himself: he has learned how to deal with crystal, he has learned about a language that transcends words, and he has learned about omens.

The shop is more successful with Santiago's innovation, but Santiago still focuses his dreams for the future on buying more sheep and returning home. He also twists Melchizedek's advice in his mind to support his new desires and justify his actions to himself.

One day, Santiago overhears a man in the street complaining that it is impossible to find a decent place to get something to drink after the steep climb up the hill. The boy sees this as an omen, and he tells the crystal merchant that they should also sell tea in their shop. They could sell the tea in the crystal glasses so that people would buy the tea, and also be encouraged to buy the glasses.

Although Santiago has strayed from his Personal Legend, he has learned from Melchizedek how to value omens. He realizes that speech or a person can present an omen—not just a dream or a physical sign. Santiago's intuition and creativity continue to benefit the crystal shop.

The crystal merchant tells Santiago that he's had the shop for so long that he knows what will happen if they start to serve tea: the shop will expand and it will change the crystal merchant's way of life. Santiago thinks this must be a good thing, but the crystal merchant disagrees, because he is used to the way things are. The crystal merchant tells Santiago that he has been a real blessing to him, but now he has also realized that every blessing, when it is ignored, becomes a curse. In this way, Santiago has become a curse because he has presented the crystal merchant with new possibilities. Now the crystal merchant knows the things he should be able to accomplish, even though he doesn't want to do these things.

Again, Santiago meets resistance from the merchant when he tries to change the way the shop works. Santiago's role as both blessing and curse shows the problem with holding onto the past and fearing change. The merchant was content in feeling like he had no control over his life, but when he is given clear proof that he does *have control, and then he still refuses to change, he cannot return to that state of contentment again. The merchant sees his own potential reflected in Santiago, and thus sees only wasted potential in himself.*

The crystal merchant completes their conversation with the word "maktub." Santiago asks him what this means. The crystal merchant translates it as "it is written." He tells the boy that they can start selling tea in the crystal glasses. Sometimes there is no way to stop change when it is coming.

The word "maktub" appears throughout the novel, and acknowledges the theme of omens and divine intervention. It also brings up the idea of fate and free will, which for Coelho are not contradictory concepts. One's fate might be "written" by God, but each person still has the freedom to either choose or reject that fate.

Customers climb the hill and are tired when they reach the top. They see a crystal shop which offers fresh mint tea. When they drink the tea from the beautiful crystal glasses, they are impressed and buy some crystal. Before long the news spreads, and many people climb the hill just to visit the shop that sells both crystal and tea.

The move of selling tea in the crystal shop is the perfect marketing ploy, reflecting the importance of observing the world around you and listening to "omens." This is one of the lessons repeated throughout the book.

The crystal merchant hires two other employees to keep up with growing demand. The months pass. One day Santiago awakes before dawn. It has been more than eleven months since he came to Africa. He dresses for the day in Arabian clothing. He smokes and drinks his morning tea in silence, and when he is finished, he reaches into his pocket and withdraws a bundle of money. It is enough money to buy one hundred and twenty sheep, plus a return ticket to his homeland and a license to import African products into his own country.

Nothing is different about the day when Santiago chooses to leave his job at the crystal shop, but he feels it is the right time. He has not lost his introspective nature or his closeness to the world around him. Santiago has more than enough money to return home and buy sheep, and this fact suggests that he has been putting off that *journey as well—perhaps still unwilling to abandon the pyramids.*

When the crystal merchant wakes up and comes into the shop, Santiago tells him that he is leaving that day. They both have enough money to fulfill their dreams. Santiago asks the crystal merchant for his blessing. The crystal merchant says that he is proud of Santiago, but he says that he is not going to Mecca, just as Santiago is not going to buy back **his sheep**. Santiago is startled, and wonders who told the merchant this. "Maktub," the crystal merchant replies.

The crystal merchant sees the truth about Santiago before Santiago has acknowledged it to himself. Just as he knows his own character and that he won't go to Mecca, he knows Santiago's character and that the young man won't give up on his original dream. The merchant believes Santiago's quest is the will of God.

Santiago goes to his room and packs his belongings, and as he's leaving he find his old shepherd's pouch. As he removes his jacket from the pouch, the stones **Urim and Thummim** fall to the ground, The stones make Santiago remember Melchizedek, and he is startled by how long it has been since he has thought of the old king, and his reminder to never stop dreaming. Santiago picks up the stones and has a strange feeling, as if the old king is nearby. He reflects that **his sheep** taught him something very important: that there was a language in the world that everyone understands.

It seems like an omen in itself that at this moment Santiago finds the fortune-telling stones Urim and Thummim—the symbols of letting something other than oneself decide one's fate. Melchizedek had said that he appears when someone is about to give up on his or her Personal Legend, so the fact that Santiago suddenly feels his presence means that Santiago is at a crossroads.

Santiago remembers that Melchizedek told him that when you want something, the universe conspires to help you achieve it, but he hadn't said anything about the hardships that Santiago would face. Santiago picks up his pouch and puts it with his other packed belongings. Downstairs, he finds the crystal merchant helping a foreign couple. For the first time, he reflects on the similarities between the crystal merchant and the old king. He leaves without saying goodbye, because he does not want to cry in front of the clients. He is going to miss the shop and the things that he learned there.

Santiago has partly lost faith in his Personal Legend because of the hardships he has endured through losing his money, and because not everything is as easy as Melchizedek had first made it out to be. Santiago and the crystal merchant share more than the usual boss-employee relationship. The fact that Santiago leaves without saying goodbye suggests a mutual respect and shared understanding more than a lack of concern or emotion.

Santiago tells himself that he is going to return to the fields he knows and to his **flock**, but he is not happy with this decision. He wonders if it is better to be like the crystal merchant and never go to Mecca, or to go through life trying to realize one's dream, but failing. But **Umin and Thummim** have now reminded him of the old king, and Santiago convinces himself that he should go to **the pyramids in Egypt**, because he may never have another chance. Although he is only two hours from home and a desert away from the pyramids, he decides to think of this in terms of being two hours closer to his treasure.

Santiago feels torn between his two dreams, a return to the past, or seeking a different future. He wonders if the crystal merchant's situation is potentially more desirable than trying to follow your Personal Legend and failing. Now fear of failure holds Santiago back, but he overcomes his fear and decides to focus instead on the positives—the progress he has made towards his goal.

Santiago decides to pursue his treasure, and suddenly feels tremendously happy. He reminds himself that he can always go back to being a shepherd, or that he can become a crystal salesman again. He seeks out a caravan crossing the desert and he holds **Urim and Thummim** in his hand as he does so. He remembers the old king telling him that he is always nearby whenever someone wants to realize his Personal Legend.

Santiago's relief and happiness at making this tough decision shows that he has made the right one. His Personal Legend is, after all, something he desires and wants to achieve, and supposedly something that God wants him to achieve as well. He made his decision without Urim and Thummim, but keeps them near him to remember Melchizedek.

Meanwhile, an Englishman is sitting on a bench in a warehouse. As he leafs through his chemical journal, he tells himself that he thought he would never end up in a place like this. He believes in omens, and he's working on finding the one true language of the universe. First he studied Esperanto, then world religions, and most recently **alchemy**. He feels that although he has discovered important truths about alchemy, he is not yet an alchemist. He hopes to find an alchemist to serve as his mentor.

The Englishman's introduction reveals his character and priorities. He seems to be on a similar quest to Santiago, or at least is learning about similar ideas (like the universal language). He is reading a chemical journal, reflecting his new focus on alchemy. His intensive studies show that he believes in learning, but primarily in book *learning. He doesn't yet try to learn just by observing the world around him.*

The Englishman has spent much of his family's fortune seeking the Philosopher's Stone, which is the Master Work of all alchemists. Through his research, he learned of a famous alchemist who is said to have discovered the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life. He learned that this alchemist lives in the desert, at the **Al-Fayoum oasis**, so he decided to go in search of the alchemist.

The Englishman's quest for the alchemist reintroduces the key character and namesake of the novel. It is clear already that Santiago's path will also cross Al-Fayoum and the world of the alchemist as he journeys to Egypt. The principles of alchemy, first introduced here, will be important throughout the novel.

As the Englishman is waiting for the caravan, a young Arab arrives. The Arab boy asks the Englishman where he is headed. The Englishman does not want to talk, so the boy takes out a book and begins to read. The Englishman notices that the boy's book is written in Spanish, and he is relieved, because his Spanish is better than his Arabic.

Here we again see Santiago through the eyes of another—he has lived in Morocco long enough that he looks like a typical Arab boy. Santiago can recognize the Englishman's introverted nature, and immediately proves himself a kindred spirit by taking out a book of his own instead of pursuing a conversation.

Santiago is trying to read the burial scene at the beginning of his book. He realizes that he has never been able to read past the first few pages of this book. Instead of reading, Santiago reflects that when he had decided to seek out his treasure, he actually ended up working in the crystal shop. Now he has decided to join a desert caravan, but the next step of this journey is a mystery to him. Nearby, the Englishman is also reading.

Reading has not been at the top of Santiago's list of priorities recently, and he is still reading the first pages of the book he'd had when Melchizedek first interrupted him. Coelho is oddly dismissive of reading, especially as a writer himself. He seems to value observation and personal experience above book learning. Santiago matures in accepting that the future will be a mystery to him, and he will just have to accept it when it comes.

Santiago puts away his book and takes out **Urim and Thummim**. The Englishman recognizes the stones, and Santiago immediately returns them into his pocket. "They're not for sale," he tells the Englishman, who laughingly says that they're not worth much, but that those who know about such things would immediately have recognized them. Santiago tells him that a king gave the stones to him as a present. The Englishman takes a matching pair of stones out of his pocket.

Urim and Thummim bridge the gap between Santiago and the Englishman. Both have the stones, and understand their uses. Santiago's initial desire to protect his stones shows that he learned his lesson with the thief and is not inclined to flaunt his possessions. It's suggested that the Englishman has also encountered Melchizedek, in one form or another.

Santiago says that the Englishman must not believe a king would talk to someone like him, a simple shepherd. The Englishmen says that shepherds were the first to recognize a king when the rest of the world did not, so it's not surprising that any king would talk to shepherds. He tells Santiago that this story is in the Bible, and that the Bible is the same book that taught him about **Urim and Thummim**. In the Bible, priests would carry these stones embedded in their golden breastplates.

It seems strange that Santiago was raised in a Christian society and once studied to become a priest, but he doesn't know one of the most basic and famous stories of the Bible: the story of Jesus's birth. This might be an oversight on Coelho's part, or just another way of showing how vague and universal Santiago's faith is—it's not attached to any particular doctrine.

The Englishman tells Santiago that there is a universal language already understood by everybody. He says he is in search of that language, and hopes to find an alchemist in the desert who can teach him more.

The idea of universal language appears throughout this novel. Santiago has already observed the existence of this language, and witnessed its potential. He and the Englishman are on similar quests.

The warehouse boss arrives, interrupting Santiago and the Englishman's conversation. He tells them that there's a caravan leaving today for **Al-Fayoum**. The Englishman says that this must be a good luck omen. He feels it was no coincidence that he met Santiago, who also had **Urim and Thummim** with him. Santiago tells the Englishman that he is looking for a treasure. The Englishman responds that in a certain way, he is doing the same. Santiago admits to the Englishman that he doesn't know what **alchemy** is.

The Englishman also speaks of omens, a sign that Santiago's preparation for this quest—receiving Urim and Thummim, learning about omens—aligns closely with the teachings of alchemy. Santiago willingly tells the Englishman the truth about his quest, which shows that he believes in it once more.

The leader of the caravan introduces himself to the people who will be accompanying him across the desert. There are about two hundred people and four hundred animals. The leader of the caravan says that there are a lot of different people accompanying the caravan, and they believe in many different forms of God. He tells his followers that the only God he serves is Allah, and he swears on Allah that he will do everything possible to protect the people in his caravan. But he wants the people to swear by their Gods that they will follow his instructions, because in the desert, disobedience means death.

This scene again emphasizes the importance of religion in the novel. Religion is often a divisive force in the world, but here Coelho suggests that it can also serve to bring people together—particularly in a harsh environment like the desert. The people in the caravan may follow different gods, but the novel never focuses on any particular religion, instead portraying a vague God as the "Hand That Wrote All" and/or the "Soul of the World."

Santiago swears to Jesus, but the Englishman says nothing. Santiago and the Englishman have both bought camels to ride. The Englishman continues his conversation with Santiago as the pair starts on their journey. The caravan begins to move, and it's impossible to hear what the Englishman is saying. However, Santiago knows what he is trying to say, because he too has been led to the desert by a chain of connected events. The closer one gets to one's Personal Legend, the more the Personal Legend defines one's reason for being. The caravan travels toward the east, and Santiago spends his time silently observing the progress of the animals and people. In the desert the only sound is the wind and the movements of the animals.

The Englishman does not have faith in any god, yet he believes in omens (and seemingly knows the Bible better than the supposedly Christian Santiago). Santiago understands the Englishman's feeling of being led on a path of connected events. This shows that the Englishman, like Santiago, knows what his Personal Legend is and has been seeking it with conviction. Santiago observes the desert and the caravan, and is able to learn from this form of study, just as he used to learn by observing his sheep.

One night Santiago talks to a camel driver, who tells him that, despite how many times he has crossed the desert, the infinite size of the desert still makes him feel small. Santiago understands what he means, although he has never visited the desert before. He reflects that he's learned things from his **sheep** and from working with crystal, and he should be able to learn something from the desert, too. He thinks of his sheep, but reminds himself that they're not his sheep anymore. He is glad that they have probably forgotten him. They are used to traveling, and therefore know how to move on.

The camel driver will be another influential character on Santiago's journey. Santiago realizes that his sheep entirely live in the moment, and therefore are able to be happy with each new place and new turn of events. Everything on his journey seems to be working together to teach Santiago new lessons.

Santiago also thinks about the merchant's daughter, and feels certain that she has married someone else. He feels that his intuitive understanding of the camel driver's comment about the desert means that he might be learning some of the universal language that connects all people. His mother used to refer to this as "hunches." He thinks of the crystal merchant and says, "maktub."

The idea of a universal language, related to the interconnectedness of all things, has repeatedly appeared in Santiago's life. It will continue to be an important part of the book, especially as it is connected to the principles of alchemy.

Sometimes as it travels, the caravan has to go around a boulder or rocky area, but whenever they make a major detour they still continue in generally the same direction. The Englishman is unaware of this, because he is focused on reading his books. Santiago also has his book, but he finds it more interesting to observe the caravan in the desert. He becomes friends with the camel driver, and at night as they sit around the fire together. Santiago tells him about being a shepherd, and the camel driver tells Santiago about himself. He had a happy life as a farmer, and had made at the pilgrimage to Mecca with his family. One day, there was an earthquake, and the Nile River overflowed its banks. The camel driver had never imagined that this was something that could happen to him. The land was ruined, and so he had to seek out another form of income.

The caravan's ability to head toward a destination despite any obstacles serves as a metaphor for Santiago's journey. At times, he has been sidetracked or diverted, but he continues to move toward his goal. The camel driver's path to his current profession seems to have been part choice and part fate, it seems. He lost everything from his previous life through no fault of his own—a fact that seems to contradict Coelho's claim about the "greatest lie in the world." The concepts of fate and free will need not be contradictory, though. The camel driver had no control over his loss, but he was able to choose what to make of his new life after this loss.

The camel driver says that disaster taught him to understand that people need not fear the unknown if they're capable of achieving their needs and wants. He says that he sees how many people are afraid of losing what they have, but this fear is no longer relevant when they understand that human lives were written by the same hand that created the world.

The camel driver learned from his experience that it is pointless to fear loss because there is no real "loss"—everything has been written, so any "loss" is just another step on his journey, one written by the God who made the world.

Occasionally, the caravan encounters another group traveling in the desert. Sometimes men appear and share information about thieves and warring tribes. There is a sense of fear in the air when there is discussion of the tribal wars, even though no one comments on it. Santiago realizes that this awareness of shared fear is another aspect of the universal language without words.

Gossip about the desert wars foreshadows the threat these wars will pose later in the novel. The fear of attack connects the people, Santiago sees, because it is communicated from person to person without words.

The Englishman asks the camel driver if they're in danger from the tribal wars. The camel driver says that in the desert there's no going back, and so they must move forward through danger. "Maktub," he says. Santiago tells the Englishman that he should pay more attention to the caravan. In turn, the Englishman tells Santiago that he should read more.

The camel driver has the same perspective on the tribal wars as he did on the loss of his previous life. He believes that whatever happens is meant to be. Santiago and the Englishman can each learn from the other's learning style, balancing reading with observation.

The caravan begins to travel faster, and the days and nights are passed in silence. One night the Englishman is unable to sleep, and he and Santiago go for a walk. Santiago tells the Englishman about his life, and the Englishman is fascinated with the progress Santiago was able to make with his innovative ideas in the crystal shop. He tells Santiago that there's a common principle that connects all things, which he refers to as the Soul of the World. Desiring something with all your heart brings you close to the Soul of the World. The Englishman says that everything, including animals, plants, and objects, has a soul. Therefore, in the crystal shop, even the glass may have been helping Santiago succeed.

The Englishman and Santiago maintain their friendship despite their different understandings of ways of learning. The Englishman explains some ideas of alchemy, and it's clear that Santiago has already encountered these very concepts in his quest. The Soul of World shows that everything is connected, which Santiago has already sensed through the idea of the universal language. The Englishman possesses the terminology of alchemy, but the ideas are not unfamiliar to Santiago.

Santiago says that he has observed the caravan carefully, and that the caravan and the desert speak the same language. It is this unity that will allow them to reach the **oasis**. He recognizes that if either of them had joined the caravan without an awareness of the universal language, the journey would have been much more difficult for them. The boy says he has seen how the guides read the signs of the desert, and how the desert and the caravan speak to each other. The Englishman admits that he should pay more attention to the caravan, and Santiago says that he would like to read the Englishman's books.

Santiago sees the desert and the caravan as two entities communicating and speaking the same language—and able to work together. Both Santiago and the Englishman know about the Universal Language, but the Englishman has not been paying attention to its use in the desert. He realizes that Santiago is right and that he is not using his understanding of alchemy to its fullest potential. In turn, Santiago wants to read more about alchemy.

The Englishman's books teach many strange ideas. In one book, Santiago learns that the most important item in **alchemy** is **the Emerald Tablet**. Santiago wonders why, if this single text explains everything about the study of alchemy, do alchemists need so many books about their subject? The Englishman says that all the other books help them to understand the few lines that are inscribed on the Emerald Tablet. Santiago enjoys reading the stories of the most famous alchemists. They worked on purifying metals in their laboratories, and tried to discover the Master Work, which required them to understand the universal language.

Through reading the Englishman's books, Santiago learns about the Emerald Tablet, one of the key symbols in the novel. The Emerald Tablet symbolizes the value of simplicity, which is an important theme in the book. All the secrets of alchemy were simple enough to be contained on a single tablet, but men like the Englishman prize complexity and do not see the value of this. Santiago, on the other hand, immediately questions the need for so much other reading about the topic.

Santiago asks the Englishman if observing the world is sufficient for learning to understand the universal language. The Englishman responds that Santiago is obsessed with simplifying everything. He feels that the many steps of **alchemy** are important. The two parts of the Master Work are the creation of the Elixir of Life, and the creation of the Philosopher's Stone. The Elixir of Life keeps the maker from growing old, and the Philosopher's Stone can turn other metals into gold. The Englishmen says that in the process of purifying metals, the alchemists purified themselves.

Santiago's focus on simplicity and on learning from pure observation of the world is lost on the Englishman, who values the complexity and element of study in his subject. The processes of alchemy allow a person to change himself, *and this takes time and many steps. As soon as we are introduced to the details of alchemy, it is already being used as an extended metaphor for life and one's spiritual journey.*

Santiago realizes that the crystal merchant had a similar understanding of his work, because he said it was a good thing to clean crystal in order to free oneself from negative thoughts. Santiago begins to believe that one can learn **alchemy** in everyday life. Santiago is particularly interested in the Philosopher's Stone, but whenever he tries to learn how to achieve the Master Work, he becomes completely overwhelmed by the obscure texts.

Santiago applies the Englishman's argument for the value of the process of alchemy to the process of cleaning crystal. Santiago likes to make connections and draw wisdom from everything he has seen or experienced, and each new connection emphasizes the theme of interconnectedness and the universal language.

Santiago asks the Englishman why the alchemists of the past have made the processes of **alchemy** so complicated. The Englishman replies that the complexity allows only those with enough responsibility to understand, as not just anyone should be able to transform lead into gold. Only those who are willing to study deeply achieve the Master Work. The Englishman doesn't respond to all of Santiago's questions, but instead shares that he has been observing the caravan, and has only noticed the increasing talk of war.

The Englishman sees complexity as a necessary gatekeeper to the secrets of alchemy. The responsibility of studying weeds out those who are too irresponsible or otherwise somehow unworthy of alchemical knowledge. The Englishman's inability to learn from the caravan shows his fixation on the idea of knowledge as something complex and exclusive, rather than intuitive and universal.

Santiago returns the **alchemy** books to the Englishman. The Englishman asks him what he has earned. Santiago says that he learned about the Soul of the World, and that many alchemists realize their Personal Legends by discovering the Soul of the World. Most importantly, however, he learned that all these things were so simple they could be inscribed in a few lines on the surface of **the Emerald Tablet**.

Santiago has already learned more about simplicity and interconnectedness, two themes of the novel, through this brief study of alchemy. The Englishman, however, has learned nearly the opposite lesson from studying the exact same texts, showing the importance of character and perspective in learning.

The Englishman is disappointed, because none of the complexity and years of research involved in **alchemy** have made an impression on Santiago. He tells Santiago to go back to watching the caravan, saying that that activity did didn't teach him anything either. Santiago returns to his contemplation, reflecting that everyone has his own way of learning things, and he respects the Englishman for pursuing his Personal Legend.

The Englishman does not value Santiago's interpretation of alchemy because it is different from his own, and perhaps he also feels that Santiago hasn't proven his "worthiness" by studying for years. Santiago feels that there are different ways of learning, and respects the Englishman's approach. He sees that they are both following their Personal Legends, despite their differences.

The caravan travels day and night, and the animals are exhausted from being pushed at a faster pace. Only the camel driver seems unconcerned by the threat of war. He tells Santiago that he focuses on the activity that he is doing in the moment, and on the fact that he is alive. He doesn't live in his past or his future. He says that if you can concentrate on the present, you'll be happy. Two nights, later he points out the **oasis** on the horizon. Santiago asks why they don't hurry there, and the camel driver responds, "because we have to sleep."

More wisdom from the camel driver helps calm Santiago's concern about the threat of the war, and teaches him to do each thing in its own time. The camel driver achieves peace of mind by living in the moment (like Santiago's sheep) and focusing only on the present. This concept also brings other world religions into the novel, although only vaguely. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the practice of meditation is often based in the idea of living in the moment and detaching from anxiety or fear connected to the past and future.

Santiago awakes with the sunrise and can see the date palms of the **oasis**. The Englishman exclaims happily, but Santiago is quiet and content to look at the trees of the oasis. He recognizes that he still has a long way to go to reach the **pyramids**. But now he has learned from the camel driver, and he wants to live in the moment. In this moment, the presence of the date palms signifies shade, water, and refuge from danger.

Santiago's feelings about arriving at the oasis are tempered by his awareness of the long journey beyond this haven. But he checks this feeling, having learned from the camel driver to enjoy the moment of success and security as it is achieved rather than worrying about the future.

At the **oasis**, the alchemist is watching the caravan arrive. All types of new activity stir up dust, and the children of the oasis excitedly greet the new arrivals. None of this energy matters to the alchemist, as he has seen so many people come and go, and in all that time, the desert that holds them has not changed.

The story now shifts to the alchemist and follows his perspective. He is an entirely mysterious figure for now, one who seems both wise and detached from the fleeting world of humanity.

This time, however, the alchemist knows that in the caravan there is a man to whom he can teach some of his secrets. Omens have revealed this to him, and he believes he will know the man when he sees him. He reflects that the secrets of **alchemy** need to be transmitted by word-of-mouth. His only explanation for this is that the truths that he will teach are of a kind that cannot be captured in pictures or words. Pictures and words can distract people from the Language of the World.

Like Melchizedek, the alchemist seems to have supernatural knowledge, and he knows that a potential new student will arrive with this caravan because the omens have indicated it. This foreshadowing leaves open the identity of the pupil—and the question of whether it will be the Englishman or Santiago.

Santiago is surprised to see that the **oasis** is larger than many towns in Spain. The Englishman observes that it looks like something out of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Curious children surround them, and men and women ask about the fighting and the products that they've brought over the desert. The camel driver has explained to Santiago that the oases are considered neutral territories, because most of the inhabitants are women and children. When the tribes fight, they leave the oases as places of refuge.

The oasis is considered a neutral territory even in the desert wars. It is a haven for women and children, and at a more essential level, it is necessary for life itself—no matter which side you might be fighting for, all humans need water and shelter in the desert. The oasis as neutral territory will be challenged in the novel, but its portrayal as a haven and site of common human decency persists.

The leader of the caravan calls his people together and gives them instructions. They plan to stay at the **oasis** until the conflict between the tribes is over. He asks everyone to hand over any weapons that they might be carrying, because in the neutral zone of the oases no one is allowed to carry weapons. Santiago is surprised to see that the Englishman has a revolver. He says that carrying a revolver helped him "to trust in people."

The decision to stay at the oasis makes sense for others, but it is now another barricade on Santiago's path towards his Personal Legend. The Englishman further reveals his distrustful and self-focused nature with his explanation of the revolver. He keeps himself separate from the others, with the exception of Santiago.

Santiago realizes that the closer he gets to his treasure, the more difficult pursuing it has become. He does not want to push forward impulsively and ignore omens from God. He thinks of the camel driver, and reminds himself to do everything in its own time. On their first day in the **oasis**, the travelers sleep. Santiago is assigned to a tent with other young men, and he tells them about his life as a shepherd and about working in the crystal shop. The Englishman comes into the tent while Santiago is sharing his story, and says that he's been looking for him. He wants Santiago to help him find where the alchemist lives. The two search for the alchemist, and discover that the oasis is larger than they could have imagined.

Santiago reflects on the further problem of the caravan staying indefinitely at the oasis, but because of the camel driver's teaching, Santiago tries to see this "delay" as just another part of the journey, unlike his time with the crystal merchant in Tangier, which nearly derailed him from his quest. The Englishman seems to trust Santiago alone and no one else in the oasis. The Englishman is less willing to embrace the world, preferring to separate himself from others and to learn from books.

The Englishman frets that they've wasted an entire day in their search, and Santiago says that they need to ask for help. They sit down near the wells and the Englishman says that Santiago, who speaks better Arabic, should ask people about the alchemist. Santiago approaches a woman who has come to the well for water, but the woman says she has never heard of the alchemist, and quickly hurries away. Before she does so, she tells Santiago that it is against their custom for him to converse with a married woman. The Englishman is disappointed, because he fears that he has come all this way for nothing. Santiago points out that he had never heard of **alchemy**, so maybe others in the **oasis** simply don't know the alchemist by that title. The Englishman agrees, and decides to ask for the person who cures illnesses.

Santiago and the Englishman's plan to question people at the well backfires, as married woman are shocked to be approached by strange men, and most people are not familiar with alchemy in the first place. This presentation of cultural differences regarding women shows that Santiago and the Englishman are now truly in an environment that is foreign to them, and they are faced with other ways of thinking than those they're familiar with. The two men find ways to work around this, however, demonstrating the possibility of human connections across borders and cultures.

They ask a man who comes to the well, and he wonders why they want to find that person. The man reflects that perhaps they are asking about a certain powerful man, whom not even the tribal chieftains are able to see when they wish to. He warns them to wait for the end of the war, and then leave with the caravan. Despite this word of warning, the Englishman is excited to hear that they are on the right track.

Here we are presented with another seemingly cultural difference between the two characters and the people of the oasis: the people of the oasis do not value the alchemist, but instead fear him. And yet it's also clear that the alchemist is famously powerful, as tribal chieftains want to see him, and he can even deny them an audience without facing consequences.

A young woman appears at the well, and is not dressed in black like the married woman. Santiago approaches her to ask about the alchemist, and suddenly he feels the life of the Soul of the World. Immediately he realizes that the language that everyone on earth can understand is love. The young woman smiles, and Santiago sees that as a good omen. Even though his family told him to meet and get to know a girl before committing himself to her, he knows in that moment that he is in love. He feels that she has been waiting for him in the desert. Only that present moment matters, andSantiago is suddenly certain that everything that exists was written by the same hand, and with great love. "Maktub," he thinks.

Santiago is overwhelmed by love as he approaches a young woman at the well. His wholehearted commitment seems sudden, and he himself acknowledges this in the face of the advice he received from his family. However, the language of this passage ties Santiago's love to the ideas of "maktub" and the Soul of World. He is in love with this woman so suddenly because the pair is somehow connected by fate. This love is presented as beyond Santiago's control, and written by the Hand That Wrote All. While much of the novel is presented as a kind of parable or even "self-help" book for the reader, this idea of love at first sight seems less applicable to real life.

Santiago asks the girl her name, and she says it is Fatima. The Englishman prods Santiago to ask about a man who cures illnesses. Fatima says that there is a man who knows all the secrets of the world, and who communicates with genies of the desert. She points in the direction of where the man lives. Then, filling her vessel with water, she leaves the well. The Englishman leaves in the direction that Fatima pointed, but Santiago sits at the well for a long time. He realizes that he loved Fatima even before he knew her.

Fatima tells Santiago and the Englishman about a man who seems to be the alchemist, but the way she describes him makes him seem more like someone practicing witchcraft than alchemy. Santiago immediately accepts the idea that he and Fatima are meant to be together—but we don't see Fatima's side of the story yet.

The next day Santiago returns to the well, hoping to see Fatima. She is not there, but the Englishman is. He tells Santiago that he encountered the alchemist, and told him of his goal. The alchemist then asked him if he had ever transformed lead into gold, and the Englishman responded that he has come to the **oasis** to learn how to do so. The alchemist responded that he should try his hand at this on his own first. The Englishman says that he is going to try, and he's going to start this very day.

The Englishman is changed even by his brief encounter with the alchemist. He has seemingly overcome his fear and accepted that he must learn by doing, rather just than by reading and overly complicating the process of alchemy. He is not discouraged by the alchemist's rebuff, but encouraged to try the Masterwork for himself.

The Englishman leaves, and Fatima arrives at the well. Santiago tells her that he loves her and wishes to marry her. He tells her that he has come into the desert in search of a treasure near the **pyramids**. He thought of the war as a curse, but now he sees it as a blessing, because it has brought him to the **oasis** and to Fatima. Fatima points out that the war is going to end someday. Santiago feels in his heart that Fatima is more important than his treasure. Fatima says that the tribesmen are always in search of treasure, and that the women of the desert are proud of them. She fills her vessel with water and leaves.

Despite their very brief acquaintance, Santiago immediately declares himself to Fatima and tells her the truth about his quest, which shows that he trusts her. Her statement about the women being proud of the questing men suggests that she wants Santiago to continue on his journey, rather than staying at the oasis for her sake. It's also notable that Fatima herself seems to have no agency in the matter—it's assumed that she loves Santiago, and the conflict immediately moves back to whether or not Santiago should be "distracted" by her or not.

Santiago goes to the well every day to meet Fatima. He tells her about his life as a shepherd, his encounter with Melchizedek, and his work in the crystal shop. The two become friends. Santiago tells Fatima that the leader of the caravan called a meeting, and told those traveling with the caravan that he didn't know when the war would end and allow the caravan to continue its journey. Fatima says that she has learned from Santiago about the universal language and the Soul of the World. She says that she has now become a part of Santiago and his quest.

Unlike Santiago's courtship of the merchant's daughter, the stories he tells Fatima are true, rather than fabrications intended to impress. Fatima's character is two-dimensional throughout the novel, and we learn little about her other than her willingness to instantly embrace Santiago's quest as part of her own life. It now becomes more clear that everything and everyone Santiago encounters is portrayed as some kind of lesson or archetype put there for the sake of his education—there are few characters in the book that feel complex and alive, apart from their relation to Santiago and the lessons he is learning.

Fatima realizes that she has been waiting for Santiago at the **oasis** for a long time. Ever since she was a child, she dreamed that a wonderful present would appear for her from the desert. Fatima says that because Santiago has told her about his dreams and about the omens, she now realizes that those omens have brought them together. She says that, because of this, she wants Santiago to continue toward his goal and pursue his dream. The desert never changes, and their love too will never change. Fatima says "maktub," and tells Santiago that if they are really part of the same dream, and meant to be together, then he'll return to her one day.

In retrospect, Fatima sees that she was aware Santiago would come out of the desert because of omens. Fatima's belief in omens shows that she, like Santiago and the Englishman, can understand the idea of a Personal Legend. That's why she encourages Santiago to continue to his quest, trusting he will return if it is written. It's suggested that Fatima*'s Personal Legend, however, is simply waiting for and loving Santiago—a telling example of her lack of agency and complexity.*

Santiago is sad after he says farewell to Fatima that day. He thinks of the difficulty of telling a loved one that you must leave them behind and travel. The next time he sees Fatima, she explains that women of the desert are used to departures. The desert always takes men away from the **oasis**. She knows that sometimes these men don't return, and if they don't return they become a part of everything, a part of the Soul of the World. She says that she will become one of the women who wait. As a desert woman, she wants her husband to be able to wander free, and she knows that if he never returned to her, she could accept the fact that he had become part of the Soul of the World.

Santiago again feels torn between staying and departing, as he did when he considered whether or not to sell his sheep and start his quest. Fatima's upbringing as a desert woman has acclimated her to the idea of departures, especially men leaving the women who love them. Fatima's acceptance of Santiago's path seems understanding, yet ultimately uninteresting. Fatima's character primarily exists to support and reassure Santiago, and to act as another "lesson" on his quest.

Santiago goes in search of the Englishman, to tell him about Fatima. He finds that the Englishman has built a furnace outside his tent. The Englishman seems livelier than he did before, and he says that he has begun the first phase of the job to purify the metals and start the Master Work. He says that before this, he was held back by his fear of failure. But now he's beginning what he should have begun ten years ago. He's happy that he didn't wait twenty more years to start the Master Work, at least.

The Englishman has changed even more now that he has begun the Masterwork. He is cheerful and relieved that he is finally starting this project, and seems to be experiencing the "beginners luck" that Santiago once enjoyed. He lives according to his own choice to pursue the Masterwork, rather than being guided by fear.

Santiago feels the urge to walk out into the desert. He listens to the wind and feels the stones beneath his feet. He finds a few shells and realizes that once upon a time the desert had been a sea. As he sits in the desert thinking, he sees a pair of hawks flying in the sky. He wonders if these desert birds could explain to him the meaning of love without ownership. Suddenly one of the hawks attacks the other end and, with this action, the boy is given a sudden vision. The vision is of an army attacking the **oasis**.Santiago wishes he could forget the vision and return to his earlier thoughts, but he cannot. Melchizedek had told him to always pay attention to omens.

Santiago is continually attentive to the desert, and the desert rewards him by showing him the future in the form of an omen and a vision. Historically, birds have long been associated with fortune telling and omens, and two hawks trigger Santiago's vision here. The question now is how he will respond to the vision of disaster—the oasis's fate has been "written," but Santiago's free will now takes over in deciding whether or not that fate will come to pass.

Santiago returns to the **oasis** and finds the camel driver. Santiago tells him that he knows an army is coming, because he has had a vision. He also tells the camel driver about the hawks, and about his feeling that he was in touch with the Soul of the World. The camel driver understands, because he knows that anything on the face of the earth could teach a person about the history of all things. Seers are able to access the Soul of the World, but the tribespeople only consult seers tentatively, because they know that knowing the future could paralyze them in the present. But the camel driver is not a worrier, and therefore has consulted several seers, some of whom turned out to be right and some of whom turned out to be wrong.

Santiago picks the ideal person to share his vision with: the camel driver, who is not afraid of the future, and who also understands the idea of omens. The camel driver explains that for many people, knowing the future is problematic because it affects them in the present. This is similar to the idea of the dangers of Urim and Thummim—letting foreign or supernatural knowledge affect one's present decisions. The camel driver implies that seers are not always effective, showing that it takes a kind of mysterious skill and wisdom to receive and read omens.

Once, an old seer asked the camel driver why he was so interested in the future. The camel driver had responded that he hoped to change things he didn't want to happen. The seer pointed out that then these things would not be part of his future. The camel driver responded that maybe he simply wants to prepare himself for the future. The seer said that if good things are coming they will be good, and if bad things are coming then he will only suffer more in anticipating them before they occur.

The camel driver only arrived at his present philosophy by first directly confronting his obsession with the future. He did not always live in the moment so fully, and had to work and learn many lessons in order to reach his present state of contentment.

The old seer told the camel driver that the future truly belongs only to God. In his line of work, he guesses at the future based on the secrets concealed in the present. He says it's important to pay attention to the present so you can improve on it. If you improve on the present, you will be improving on the future. The seer encouraged the camel driver to forget about the future, and to focus on the present. The camel driver then asked the seer when God *would* permit him to see the future. The old seer responded that occasionally God himself chooses to reveal the future, but this only happens when the future is written with the intention that it be altered. Therefore, the vision must have been revealed to Santiago intentionally, so that the future can be altered.

The idea of the future belonging to God is crucial in this novel because it strikes a balance between the fate-based theme of "Maktub" and the freewill-based theme of choosing one's future. Because the future belongs to God, it can be prewritten and still also changed by the present. The ability to see the future means that God is purposefully *revealing the future to a person, thus giving them the opportunity to change it. This means that Santiago cannot ignore his vision, because he is being given the opportunity to change the future and bring about what is written.*

The camel driver tells Santiago to go and speak to the tribal chieftains and tell them what he has seen. He reassures Santiago that these men of the desert are used to dealing with omens, and that they will listen to them. This has happened before, and this time it simply happens to be Santiago who is the instrument of revealing the future.

In the world of the novel, all men of the desert are familiar with omens, and so they naturally believe Santiago. It's suggested that the desert is a very effective teacher of the Language of the World.

Santiago goes to see the chieftains. He approaches the guard at the entrance to the huge white tent at the center of the **oasis**. When he announces his intention and says that he has brought omens from the desert, the guard goes into the tent. He reemerges with a young man dressed in white and gold. The man asks him to wait and, as the Santiago waits, night falls. After hours of waiting, the guard asks Santiago to enter the tent. Santiago is astonished by the extravagance inside. The ground is covered with beautiful carpets and lamps of gold with lit candles decorating the space. The tribal chieftains are seated in a semi-circle on silk cushions, supplied with tea and hookah.

The extravagance of the tribal chieftains, both in terms of their wealth and regarding their casual treatment of Santiago's time and patience, demonstrates that they are used to being entirely in charge. Their opulence is reflective of their success and security, which depends on the oasis remaining as a neutral zone.

Santiago can immediately see which one of the chieftains is the most important: old man dressed in white and gold and seated at the center of the semi-circle. One of the chieftains asks who Santiago is, and he reports what he has seen in his vision. Another chieftain asks why the desert would reveal such things to a stranger. Santiago says it is because his eyes are not used to the desert, and so he can notice things that others might not. He also thinks, although he does not say this aloud, that it is also because he knows about the Soul of the World. The chieftains point out that the **oasis** is supposed to be neutral ground.

The leader of the chieftains is distinguished from the others by his advanced age and his central positioning, not by him speaking first or taking charge. His authority is gained in other ways. Santiago has seemingly been chosen to receive such a vision because of his awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, but he does not share this fact, as it seems to place him above the others, who are used to the desert and omens.

The chieftains speak amongst themselves in an Arabic dialect that Santiago does not know. Finally, the elder chief smiles and Santiago is reassured. The discussion ends, and the chieftains are silent as they listen to the elder. The elder chieftain turns to Santiago and explains that all of the chiefs know that whoever believes in dreams also knows how to interpret them. He speaks of Joseph, a man who believed in dreams and who was a stranger in a strange land, like Santiago.

The elder chieftain backs up his quiet authority by referencing a past figure similar to Santiago—Joseph, who is from the Biblical Old Testament, and thus a holy figure for Christians, Muslims, and Jews. A more conventional response would be for the leaders to reject Santiago as crazy or a liar, but it's clear that these chieftains are wiser than that.

The elder chieftain explains that the tribespeople observe traditions because they have helped their people survive. And tradition says that the **oasis** is a neutral territory. At the same time, tradition says that the people of the desert should believe the desert's messages. The elder chieftain announces that the next day the men will break the agreement of the oasis and carry arms—but weapons have a spirit, and if they are not used, they may not function the next time. Therefore, if, at the end of the day, the weapons have not been used, then Santiago will lose his life.

The elder chieftain's pronouncement is harsh, but it places all responsibility for Santiago's vision on his own shoulders. It's assumed that Santiago trusts his vision, as he chose to tell the chieftains about it, but the elder chieftain ensures that Santiago is entirely sure, because his survival depends on it. The idea of the weapons having a "spirit" also relates to the interconnectedness of all things, and to the concept of even inanimate objects being alive in some way and speaking a universal language.

Santiago leaves the tent to find the **oasis** illuminated by the light of a full moon. He is alarmed by the elder chieftain's decision. Santiago has been successful at reaching the Soul of the World and receiving his vision, but now he might have to pay for that success with his life. But he reminds himself of the camel driver's words—that to die one day is no worse than dying on any other. Santiago realizes that he has no regrets. Even if he dies the next day, he will have experienced much of the world and he will have lived his life in pursuit of his Personal Legend.

Santiago is naturally shaken by this encounter, but then (as always) he learns a lesson from his reaction, realizing that his alarm comes from a fear of death. The chieftain's decision is teaching him to take full responsibility for his actions, and even if this kills him, Santiago feels that he has done the right thing. More importantly, Santiago now tries to accept that dying tomorrow in an attempt to save innocent lives and pursue his Personal Legend would be no worse than dying on some other day in the future.

Suddenly there is a wind and a thundering sound, and Santiago is knocked to the ground. As the dust settles, Santiago sees a horse and a rider completely dressed in black. The strange horseman has an enormous curved sword, and he confronts Santiago, demanding to know who dares to read the flight of the hawks. Santiago speaks up, saying that he dared to do so, and that because he dared many lives will be saved. The stranger lowers the sword until it touches Santiago's forehead. It does not occur to Santiago to try to flee. He feels a sense of joy in his awareness that he is about to die, but to die in pursuit of his Personal Legend, and while seeing his vision of violence in the **oasis** actualized.

Santiago's confrontation with the mysterious horseman demonstrates that he has fully absorbed the lessons of the camel driver, as well as the concept of his Personal Legend. Santiago feels that dying while in pursuit of his Personal Legend would be worthwhile, and he does not attempt to flee because he accepts that what is written will necessarily come to pass. He also stands by his belief that he did the right thing in reading the flight of the hawks because he may have saved other lives in the process.

Again the stranger questions Santiago about why he read the flight of the hawks. Santiago says that he was only able to read what the birds wanted him to know. The stranger questions who he is to change the future that Allah has willed. Santiago points out that Allah also created the birds, and taught him the language of the hawks. The stranger cautions him to be careful with his predictions of the future. Santiago says that although he saw an army, he did not see the outcome of the confrontation.

Santiago's counterarguments to the horseman's objections show his understanding of the Soul of the World that unites all things. Santiago does not give himself credit for seeing the future, but acknowledges that God has permitted him to do so through the actions of his birds. Santiago is cautious about the future, but also confident about omens from God/the Soul of the World.

The stranger seems pleased, and asks Santiago what he is doing in the **oasis**. Santiago says that he is following his Personal Legend. The stranger says that he had to test Santiago's courage, because courage is essential when one wants to understand the Language of the World. Santiago is surprised that the stranger knows this. The stranger continues that Santiago must maintain his courage, and if he survives till the end of the next day, then he should seek him out. Santiago asks where the man lives. As the man turns his horse away, he points to the south. Santiago has met the alchemist.

Santiago tells the truth about his quest to the stranger—not because he especially trusts the stranger, but rather because he has grown more confident in himself. Santiago does not say he simply wishes to visit the pyramids, as he initially told the crystal merchant, but now specifically says that he is pursuing his Personal Legend. Santiago demonstrates the courage the alchemist was looking for—a quality the alchemist had to test for himself. At last the two main characters of the book meet, and it seems that Santiago has reached the next step of his spiritual journey.

The next day five hundred tribesmen appear on the horizon, but the men of the **oasis** surround the attackers and kill all of them. The children had been camped at the other side of the oasis, and they do not witness the battle. The women are safe in their tents. Only the commander of the enemy tribesmen is spared. The commander is brought before the tribal chieftains and asked why he violated the tradition. He explains that he and his men had acted out of starvation. The elder chieftain expresses sympathy for the commander, but says that the sacred tradition is more important. He orders the commander hanged from a palm tree, and then he calls for Santiago. He gives Santiago fifty pieces of gold, and asks him to be one of his counselors.

Santiago's vision is fulfilled, but the future is also altered because of it. This series of events best articulates Coelho's view of "maktub" and free will—the future is prewritten by God, but when God chooses to reveal visions of that future to people, it is to the give them the choice of whether or not to act and change that future. Despite the enemy commander's justification, the oasis must be upheld as a neutral, even sacred ground—a place of peace and life even in the midst of a desert and constant war.

That evening Santiago heads south through the **oasis**. He discovers a solitary tent and is told that it is a place inhabited by genies. He sits down to wait for the alchemist. The alchemist arrives when the moon is high, with two dead hawks in his hand. The alchemist asks Santiago if it is his Personal Legend that brings him into the desert. Santiago says that because of the war between the tribes, it has been impossible to cross the desert toward the **Egyptian Pyramids**. The alchemist welcomes Santiago into his tent. Santiago looks around for the implements of **alchemy**, but does not see any. The alchemist invites him to have a drink and to eat the cooked birds with him. Santiago suspects that they are the same hawks he had seen the day before.

Santiago has passed another crucial test, and now he is ready to seek out the alchemist as instructed. The dead hawks remind the reader of the power of the alchemist, but also imply the interconnectedness of all existence—the same birds have acted as wild animals, as oracles of the future, and now as food for the humans who interpreted their omens. The absence of any instruments in the alchemist's tent reinforces the idea that in the novel, at least, alchemy is about much more than just processing metals—it is a more powerful kind of magic and spiritual wisdom, and a metaphor for life itself.

Santiago asks the alchemist why he wanted to see him. Because of omens, the alchemist replies. The omens showed the alchemist that Santiago would be coming, and that he would need his help. Santiago insists that the omens spoke about the Englishman who wished to meet the alchemist. The alchemist says that the Englishman is on the right track, but that he has other things he needs to do first. The alchemist says of Santiago that he is not going to instruct him, as he already knows everything he needs to know, but he is going to point him in the direction of his treasure.

Santiago is quick to point out that the omens may not refer to him, but may have also referred to the Englishman who is desperate to learn from the alchemist. The alchemist, however, knows that Santiago is his destined pupil, especially now that he has met both men and Santiago has passed his test regarding the tribal wars. The alchemist's words suggest the idea that all the "wisdom" Santiago learns is not anything particularly new—just basic concepts that are easy to forget or ignore, and which we need to be reminded of.

Santiago reminds him of the tribal war, and insists that he has already found his treasure, which includes the gold he received that day. The alchemist points out that none of that gold is from the **pyramids**. Santiago says that he has found Fatima, and that she is a greater treasure than anything else. The alchemist says that she was not found at the pyramids either. The alchemist serves Santiago a bottle of wine, and Santiago is surprised, assuming that wine was also forbidden in the **oasis**. The alchemist says that it's not what enters men's mouths that is evil, but what comes out of them.

Despite Santiago's new assurance that he is living his life most fully by following his Personal Legend, he is again reluctant to leave behind the things he has already found. Fatima, in particular, is a "treasure" for him, and it's easy for Santiago to try to pretend that she is what he has been seeking all along. This raises the question of what Santiago's real treasure at the pyramids might be. The alchemist's words about what enters men's mouths versus what comes out of them is almost a direct quote from Jesus in the Bible.

After they eat, the two sit outside the tent under the brilliant moon. The alchemist tells Santiago to rest well and enjoy himself. He says that Santiago has to find his treasure so that his quest is complete, and so that everything he has learned already makes sense. He instructs Santiago to sell his camel and to buy a horse, because horses tire bit by bit, and he will be able to tell that his horse is tired when crossing the desert. A camel, on the other hand, will not show any signs of weariness until the moment when it drops dead.

The alchemist argues that the reason to continue to the pyramids and find the treasure is more to make sense of the journey than anything else. This feels more satisfying than simply pursuing the treasure for its own sake, especially as it's hard to imagine any "treasure" more precious than the love Santiago has already found.

The next night, Santiago arrives at the alchemist's tent with a horse. The alchemist challenges Santiago to show him where there is life in the desert, because, he says, only those who can find the signs of life are able to find treasure. Santiago does not know if he'll be able to do this, as he doesn't know the desert very well yet. He says that he knows there is life in the desert, but he doesn't know where to look. The alchemist responds, "life attracts life." Santiago understands, and he sets his horse free to lead him. The two follow the horse until it leads them to a stony area of the desert. The boy says that he knows there is life here, because his horse knows the language of life.

At first the alchemist's challenge seems impossible, but Santiago is able to correctly interpret the alchemist's advice and realize that listening to his horse will yield the answer. The novel's emphasis on animals and their innate intelligence reinforces the idea of the Soul of World. Everything is connected, and animals are not so different from people. They are also able, perhaps more so than people, to communicate through the universal language.

The alchemist searches among the stones and then reaches into a hole. He withdraws with a snake clasped in his hand. Santiago leaps back, because it is a cobra with poisonous venom. As he begins to warn the alchemist, he remembers what the Englishman had told him: the alchemist is over two hundred years old. Santiago assumes that the alchemist knows how to deal with desert snakes. The alchemist draws a circle in the sand and places the snake within it. He reassures Santiago that the snake won't leave the circle.

The alchemist contains the cobra with his first magical act. Much of the "magic" in the novel is subtle like this—usually dream interpretation or fortune telling. The alchemist's power clearly extends beyond the traditional practices of an alchemist. Santiago decides to trust the alchemist's power and wisdom, and the alchemist rewards this trust.

The alchemist tells the boy that his ability to find life in the desert was an omen that he needed, and he announces that he is going to guide Santiago across the desert. Santiago says that he wants to stay at the **oasis** because he has found Fatima. The alchemist says that because Fatima is a woman of the desert, she knows that men have to go away from time to time. She has found her treasure, and it is Santiago. Santiago asks what will happen if he decides to stay, and the alchemist paints him a portrait of this potential future.

The alchemist decides to come with Santiago on his journey to guide him, but this forces Santiago to admit the full extent of his desire to remain at the oasis with Fatima. The alchemist describes Santiago as Fatima's treasure, but Fatima is not Santiago's treasure. Once again we see just how limited a role Fatima is allowed to play, even as the "main" female character of the novel.

In this future, Santiago will be a wealthy counselor to the **oasis** chieftains. He'll be married to Fatima and they will be happy. He will get better and better at interpreting omens from the desert. Sometime during the second year, he will remember his treasure and the omens will repeatedly insist that he seek it. During the third year, Santiago will be haunted by thoughts of his treasure and his Personal Legend. Fatima will be unhappy because she'll feel responsible for having interrupted Santiago's quest. Santiago will remember that Fatima never asked him to stay, so he won't blame her, but he'll regret that he did not trust more strongly in his love for Fatima—because the only thing that kept him at the oasis was his fear that he would not return. During the fourth year the omens will abandon Santiago. He will lose his position as a counselor, and he will live with the regret of knowing that he didn't pursue his Personal Legend before it was too late.

With this picture of the hypothetical future, the alchemist gives Santiago far more information to use in making his decision than he has had previously in the novel. When Santiago nearly chose to return to Spain and repurchase his sheep, for example, he did not know what the outcome of that decision would be. This is another example of a glimpse of the future that seems already "written," but which is only provided in order that Santiago might have the choice of how to affect that future. The alchemist paints a rather bleak picture of how abandoning one's Personal Legend can lead to a life of dissatisfaction.

The alchemist tells Santiago that love never prevents a man from actualizing his Personal Legend. If he gives up his Personal Legend because of love, it was not a love that speaks the Language of the World. The alchemist erases the sand circle and the snake slithers away. Santiago thinks of the crystal merchant who wanted to go to Mecca, and of the Englishman and his search, and of the woman who trusts the desert. Santiago and the alchemist return to the **oasis**. Santiago announces that he is going in search of his treasure, and he feels peace fill his heart. The alchemist says they will leave the next day before dawn.

Throughout the novel, Santiago sees other characters who have given up on their Personal Legends, from the baker in the square to the crystal merchant. These characters give up because of fear and a lack of belief in themselves. Santiago would be intentionally turning his back on his Legend by choosing to stay with Fatima. The instant feeling of peace seems to validate Santiago's decision, as he also felt peace when he decided to go on to Egypt rather than back to Spain.

Santiago does not sleep that night. Two hours before dawn he goes in search of Fatima. He asks an Arab boy to wake her from her tent and to tell her that he's waiting to talk to her. Fatima appears outside the tent, and she and Santiago walk among the date palms. Santiago explains that he is going away, but he wants her to know that he will return. Fatima says that he does not need to explain his love for her, because no reason is needed for love. Santiago explains that he had a dream, met a king, worked for a crystal merchant, crossed the desert, and sought an alchemist at a well—and all these things led him to meet Fatima. The two embrace for the first time.

Santiago explains his decision to Fatima, but she is very accepting of his choice, and does not need his explanation. Santiago begins to see his quest in terms of all the experiences he has had along the way, but primarily values the fact that the quest has led him to Fatima. The two have fallen in love without any physical contact at all, showing that their love works in a spiritual way through the Soul of the World, and that it seems fated and inevitable.

Santiago promises that he'll be back. Fatima says that she used to look to the desert with longing, but know she will look with hope. She has seen her father go away, and he has always come back. Santiago promises to return in the same way. He sees that Fatima's eyes are filled with tears. She tells him that she may be a woman of the desert, but she is still a woman. Fatima returns to her tent, and when dawn arrives she goes out to do her regular chores. Her routine is the same, but everything else has changed. The **oasis** is now an empty place for her. From that dawn onward, the desert is important, and she looks to it every day and imagines Santiago's journey. She will send kisses to him on the wind, and the desert will represent her hope for his return.

Fatima has spent her life waiting for her father to return, and now she will spend her time waiting for Santiago to return. Fatima's tearful farewell and her happiness about continuing to wait for another man to return show little real personality or vitality on her part. Her life is reduced to a constant waiting for Santiago, and the oasis is now "empty" for her. Fatima seemingly has no independent agency or interests of her own. This extremely restricted role for the only real female character has raised sexism concerns in criticism of the novel.

The alchemist encourages Santiago to not think about what he has left behind, because The Soul of the World is permanent. Santiago reflects that men think more about returning home than leaving. The alchemist says that things made of pure matter never spoil with time, and so one can always come back to them. Even though the alchemist is speaking of metals and **alchemy**, Santiago knows that he is actually talking about Santiago's love for Fatima. It is difficult to take the alchemist's advice and not dwell on what he is leaving behind, however. The desert is uniform and monotonous, so it is easy to think of the **oasis**.

The alchemist makes a point about alchemy—that pure matter does not spoil—which serves as a metaphor for Fatima and Santiago's love. This further demonstrates the applicability of alchemy to life lessons, and Coelho's use of the ancient process as a metaphor. Santiago tries to follow both the advice of the alchemist and the camel driver and not dwell on either the past or the future.

The alchemist rides in front and his falcon sits on his shoulder. The bird hunts for game for the two to eat. At night, Santiago and the alchemist try to stay hidden. They travel in silence, except for their strategic discussions about the ongoing violence between the tribes. On the seventh day of their trip they make camp earlier than usual. The alchemist congratulates Santiago for nearing the end of his journey and for having pursued his Personal Legend. Santiago points out that along the way he hasn't learned anything new from the alchemist, and he thought that he would be taught some of the old man's wisdom. The alchemist explains that there's only way one way to learn—through action. Therefore, Santiago has already learned everything he needed to know, except for one thing.

The alchemist and Santiago travel together, and their style of traveling seems to reflect their spiritual, introspective natures—they travel in silence and live simply. Both value observation and learning from the world, although Santiago is still a little bit confused by this, as he had imagined that learning from the alchemist would consist of practical instruction. The alchemist confirms what Santiago has practiced all along, however— real learning occurs through experience and observation of the world. Santiago has been gaining the knowledge he needs throughout his journey.

Santiago asks why the alchemist is called "the alchemist," And the alchemist answers simply that "an alchemist" is what he is. Santiago asks about the other alchemists who failed to make gold from lead. The alchemist explains that these men failed because they were only looking for gold. He says that living out one's Personal Legend is more than finding one's treasure. Santiago then asks about the one thing he still needs to learn, but the alchemist does not answer.

The alchemist accepts that he is defined by his "occupation" (just as the other men Santiago has encountered on the way have been). It's suggested that those who failed to become successful alchemists were not practicing real *alchemy (as Coelho defines it), but only seeking gold. The methods of alchemy, not the end result, are what is significant, and practicing these methods and learning in this way was the alchemist's Personal Legend.*

As he prepares their dinner that night, the alchemist explains that he learned the procedures of **alchemy** from his grandfather, who learned from his father, and so on. In the early times, everything about the Master Work could be written on **the Emerald Tablet**. But because men rejected simple things, they wrote many other works of literature about the Master Work. Santiago wants to know what was written on the emerald tablet, and the alchemist draws an image in the sand. The boy tries to read what's written in the sand, but disappointedly observes that it's code.

Again Santiago is reminded that in the early history of alchemy, the Emerald Tablet was the only document that mattered. This object is once more presented as a symbol of the value of simplicity. Simplicity is a value that is not popular among many, but it matters to the alchemist and to Santiago. Just like Melchizedek (and Jesus in the Biblical reference), the alchemist writes something private and indecipherable in the sand.

The alchemist contradicts Santiago, however, saying that it is not code, but actually information that cannot be understood by reason alone. **The Emerald Tablet** is a direct link to the Soul of the World. The alchemist explains that wise men understand that the natural world is an imperfect version of paradise, and that God created the world so that men could learn about his teachings and his wisdom. Santiago wonders if he *should* understand the inscription on the Emerald Tablet. The alchemist points out that the Emerald Tablet exists in the context of **alchemy**, and the boy is in the desert, so Santiago should immerse himself in the desert, and from the desert he can learn anything that he will need to know. All he needs to do is contemplate a single grain of sand to see the power of all of creation. To do this, Santiago should listen to his heart, because it came from the Soul of the World.

The reason that the Emerald Tablet can be so simple is because it is not trying to contain lots of information, but rather to provide a link to the unifying force of the Soul of the World. The alchemist thus suggests that connecting with the Soul of the World can teach anyone anything he would need to know about alchemy. The idea of the "universe in a grain of sand" was also expressed by the poet William Blake, almost 200 years before. Coelho's ultimate lesson here seems to be that great complexity and immensity is contained in great simplicity. This could also be a metaphor for the book itself—it is simple and sparse, but tries to hint at much larger and complicated realities.

The alchemist and Santiago travel for another two days in silence. The alchemist is cautious, because they're passing through the most dangerous region where the tribal wars are being waged. As they travel, Santiago practices listening to his heart, but discovers that this is not easy to do. He remembers a time in his life when his heart spoke up clearly, but recently that hasn't been the case. There are times when his heart strongly expresses emotions, or when it beats faster as he speaks of his treasure, but no matter what his heart is never quiet. Santiago asks the alchemist why they have to listen to their hearts. The alchemist says that "because, wherever your heart is, that is where you find your treasure. "

Santiago practices listening to his heart in order to connect with the Soul of the World, as Coelho delves deeper into his own terminology and theories about spirituality. The voice of Santiago's "heart" becomes almost a distinct character in the book, but Coelho never clarifies what exactly it is—it seems like a combination of conscience, instinct, and a supernatural connection to God and/or the Soul of the World. The alchemist's words about the heart and treasure are another direct quote from Jesus in the Bible.

Santiago's heart is agitated and emotional, and keeps him awake at night thinking about Fatima. The alchemist explains these are signs that his heart is alive. Over the next three days, Santiago and the alchemist pass several warrior tribesmen, and the boy's heart expresses fear. It speaks of men who have sought their treasure and failed. Santiago says to the alchemist that his heart is fighting against his plan to go on. The alchemist says that this makes sense, because it is natural to be afraid when one has found happiness already. However, one should always listen to one's heart, because it will be speaking regardless, and if one knows one's heart well, it will never betray him. No one can escape from the feelings of his heart—so you should always listen to it, even when it is complicated and contradictory.

Santiago's heart feels many things, including fear. This fear focuses not on Santiago's physical preservation, but on the possible failures he could face in his quest to fulfill his Personal Legend. His heart is wary of moving on from the happiness he has already found, but this is not a reason to ignore the dream of his Personal Legend. The alchemist speaks of the ability of one's heart to betray a person if that person does not know his own heart well. The lessons Santiago learns grow more vague here, as he seems to be entering a more purely spiritual state.

Santiago listens to his heart and comes to understand its changes and contradictions, and he is able to move past his fear. His heart explains to him that people are afraid to pursue their most important dreams because of feelings of insufficiency or anxiety. Their hearts are fearful because they know they will suffer if they do not succeed. Santiago tells the alchemist that his heart is afraid of suffering, and the alchemist responds, "tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself." Santiago passes his words along to his heart, reminding it that he is searching for his treasure and fulfilling his dream.

Once again, Santiago experiences the universal feeling that it is easier to not try at all than to try and fail and be hurt, but the alchemist teaches that the fear of suffering is more painful than suffering itself. It is once again unclear where "Santiago" ends and "Santiago's heart" begins, as the heart has suddenly entered as a new and distinctive voice in the narrative.

Santiago's heart becomes restful and quiet, and it begins to tell him things from the Soul of the World. It tells him about happiness, and how people who are happy carry God with them. It tells Santiago that everyone on earth has a treasure waiting for him, but only a few follow their Personal Legends to find their treasure. Because people see the world as threatening, their hearts grow quieter overtime. The hearts don't want people to suffer by feeling conflicted between their fear and what their heart is telling them to do. Telling people to follow their dreams makes the heart suffer, because this so rarely succeeds. Santiago asks his heart to tell him whenever he wanders from his dreams.

Santiago's heart changes and grows less afraid as Santiago develops an understanding of it. His heart knows about the Soul of the World and about Personal Legends, suggesting that Coelho's idea of a "heart" is that of a link to God or an intuitive part of oneself that is connected to everything else. Santiago's heart acts as another voice clarifying his lessons for him, here explaining how hearts grow quiet to prevent people from trying and then failing to follow their Personal Legends.

Santiago tells all of this to the alchemist. The alchemist says Santiago must just continue in the direction of the **pyramids**, and pay attention to any omens along the way. Because he has now learned to speak to his heart, Santiago will know where his treasure is. The alchemist says that the last thing he needs to know is that before any dream is realized, the Soul of the World will test a person. This is not a cruel test, but a chance for the person to master everything that they have achieved along the way. Just as a search begins with "beginner's luck," so it ends with the person being tested. Santiago thinks that, "the darkest hour of the night comes just before the dawn."

Once Santiago has learned to speak to his heart, he is ready for his final lesson from the alchemist. The alchemist warns him that he will be tested, in order to put his new learning to use, before his quest is finalized. The toughest part of the quest comes right before success, an idea that is meant to give hope to anyone trying to persist in the face of failure or trial.

The next day, three armed tribesmen approach Santiago and the alchemist, and ask what they are doing. The alchemist explains that he's hunting. The tribesmen say they'll need to search the pair to see whether they are armed. When they search them, they wonder why they carry so much money. Santiago says he needs it to get to the **pyramids**. Among the alchemist's belongings the tribesmen find a small flask and a yellow glass egg. The alchemist explains that these are the Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone. He says that the Elixir, if drunk, will prevent someone from ever being sick again, and a fragment of the stone will turn metal into gold. The tribesmen laugh, and the alchemist laughs along. Amused at this answer, they leave the pair to proceed.

The alchemist and Santiago's altercation with the three tribesmen demonstrates the alchemist's power, which is again most apparent in his understanding of human character. He does not need to use magic, alchemy, or appeal to the Soul of the World to send the tribesmen on their way. His understanding of people gives him all he needs to persuade them to leave the pair alone. He is truthful with them, but he knows they will not believe the truth.

Santiago is amazed and shocked at the alchemist's brazen honesty, but the alchemist explains that when you possess great treasures, others rarely believe that you do. With each day of traveling in the desert, the boy's heart grows more and more silent. It is no longer active with questions—it is simply content to observe the endless days in the desert.

It is surprising to learn that Santiago has been so close to such priceless objects for so long, but as usual there is a lesson to be learned in this. The brief feeling of peace foreshadows the final test Santiago will face, as the alchemist predicted.

Santiago's heart points out something that Santiago has never noticed—at various points in his life he has been in danger without having perceived it, and in these cases his heart has protected him. One time it hid the rifle Santiago had taken from his father. Another time, Santiago had become ill and stopped traveling when, if he had continued, he would've passed thieves on the road. Santiago asks the alchemist if one's heart always helps him. The alchemist says that hearts help when somebody is trying to realize their Personal Legend, but also when one is a child, or old, or a drunkard. The heart is not a fail-safe, but it does what it can.

The alchemist clarifies the concept of one's "heart," but not very specifically. The heart is not all-powerful over the fate of an individual, and it seems to favor those in need, or those who are at a disadvantage of some kind. The kind of hindsight Santiago's heart now offers him allows Coelho to put a positive spin on almost anything—any misfortune may have just been his heart saving him from an even greater hypothetical misfortune.

One afternoon Santiago and the alchemist pass an encampment with armed men. Santiago feels that there's no danger, but the alchemist reminds him that even while he trusts in his heart, he is still at risk in the desert. As if to demonstrate the reality of this, horseman appeared behind the travelers. They stop Santiago and the alchemist, and tell them that they can't go any farther, because they're in the area where the tribes are at war. The alchemist stares straight into the eyes of the two horsemen, and eventually they agree that Santiago and the alchemist can continue on their way. Santiago is impressed, and the alchemist explains that the eyes show the strength of one's soul.

Santiago has grown somewhat cocky about danger now that he relies on his heart to protect him, but this is quickly shown to be a mistake when armed men threaten them—a heart cannot protect against immediate physical danger. Again the alchemist uses a trick of his knowledge to escape the men. This time, instead of playing the fool, he lets his strength show in his eyes as he confronts them. The alchemist always seems to sense the best ways to interact with others.

One day the alchemist announces that they're only two days from the **pyramids**. Santiago again asks about the alchemist teaching him **alchemy**. The alchemist replies that Santiago already knows the practices that allow him to reach to the Soul of the World. Santiago says that he's particularly curious about the practical aspects of turning metal into gold. The alchemist explains that everything on the earth evolves, and that in the minds of men, gold is the highest evolution of metal. Over time, however, gold became not a symbol of successful evolution, but instead a source of conflict between humans. The alchemist explains that true alchemists try to evolve with the gold that they produce from metal, and they are successful because they understand that when something evolves, the things surrounding it evolve as well.

The end of Santiago's journey is near, but he feels he hasn't learned any real alchemy from his teacher yet. His continued curiosity about gold seems childish in the face of the more serious lessons he has learned, but Santiago's Personal Legend does focus on finding treasure, so gold and treasure are in his heart. The alchemist, as usual, takes a purer and more spiritual view of the matter, and seems to place no value in gold—even considering it dangerous because of how it often leads to conflict.

When alchemists were interested only in the gold for the sake of the wealth, they never found the secret. The other metals such as lead, copper, and iron have their own Personal Legends, and if one disrupts these he will never fulfill his own Personal Legend. The alchemist picks up a shell from the sand and explains that this desert was once a sea. Santiago says he has noticed this as well. The alchemist tells Santiago to hold the shell to his ear and to listen to the sound of the sea. The shell will never stop echoing the sea, because that is its Personal Legend. It will continue to do so until the desert is once again evolved into sea.

Coelho's theories of the universe expand, so that now objects have Personal Legends as well as people. When a metal is changed to another state, this is circumventing its Personal Legend. The alchemist teaches that all things have an ideal state and role to play according to their creation. Overall this can be a comforting idea—that everything is written, essentially—but not necessarily suited to the real world, particularly when one's "role in creation" seems less than desirable.

The sun is setting that night when Santiago's heart warns of danger. Two horsemen are waiting for them, and before they can do anything the horseman are joined by others, until there are hundreds everywhere in the dunes around them. Their eyes show the strength of their souls, and they speak of death.

The alchemist has already explained the power of eyes (as "windows to the soul"), indicating that the death in these character's eyes shows their true intentions and the danger of their presence.

The tribesmen take Santiago and the alchemist to their nearby camp. There they meet the enemy chieftain, who believes that they are spies. The alchemist protests that they are just travelers. The tribesmen are suspicious because Santiago and the alchemist were seen at the enemy camp, talking to the tribesmen who stopped them there. The alchemist says that he is only acting as a guide for his friend Santiago. He tells the tribesmen that Santiago is also an alchemist, and that he can show them his extraordinary powers. He offers the money that Santiago is carrying, and the enemy chieftain accepts the gold.

The enemy chieftain believes Santiago and the alchemist are spies because they were seen with the other group of tribesmen who tried to stop them a few days earlier. The alchemist's plan relies on Santiago becoming an alchemist himself—essentially forcing Santiago to prove himself under threat of death, just as with the omen of the birds at the oasis. We sense that this is just another lesson from the alchemist, even if it is one with very high stakes.

The enemy chieftain wonders what an alchemist is. The alchemist says that an alchemist understands the forces of nature, and that he could use the wind to destroy this very camp. The chieftain says he wants to see Santiago do this. The alchemist explains that Santiago needs three days, and after that time, Santiago will transform himself into the wind. If Santiago cannot do so, he promises that both of them will offer their lives for the honor of the tribe. The enemy chieftain grants Santiago the three days.

The alchemist seems to sense what will impress the tribesmen, as he so often seems to have an intuitive understanding of other men's characters. Instead of offering his own powers, however, he sets up a situation in which Santiago must achieve a magical feat under pressure. This seems to be Santiago's final great test before he is allowed to find his treasure.

Santiago is afraid, but the alchemist tells him to not let the tribesmen see his fear. Santiago exclaims angrily that the alchemist has willingly given all of his gold to the enemy chieftain, but the alchemist says that the money has saved them for three days. Santiago is afraid, because he has no idea how to transform himself into the wind. The alchemist advises him to not give into his fears. If he remains unafraid, he will be able to listen to his heart. Santiago protests that he has no idea how to turn himself into the wind. The alchemist explains that when a person is living out his Personal Legend, he has all the tools he needs—the only thing that could hold him back is the fear of failure. He says that Santiago will have to learn how to transform himself into the wind because his life depends on it. If he does not succeed, then at least he'll die while trying to realize his Personal Legend. The alchemist concludes that Santiago shouldn't worry too much, however, because usually the threat of death makes people more aware of their lives.

Santiago is angry at the alchemist for manipulating him into this situation, and the alchemist's reaction makes his manipulation clear. As seems obvious, Santiago does not know how to turn himself into the wind. The alchemist seems to trust that the circumstances will bring out this ability in Santiago, and so he only gives him advice on how to move past his fear, not on how to actually perform the magical act itself. Santiago's frustration with his teacher is entirely understandable.

The first day passes. There's a serious battle nearby, and wounded and dead soldiers are returned to the camp. Santiago sees a soldier speaking to the body of one of his friends. The soldier says that his friend was going to die anyway, whether he died now or later, after peace had been reached. At the end of the day, Santiago seeks out the alchemist and explains that he still has no idea how to turn himself into the wind. The alchemist reminds Santiago of his previous explanation of the world: the world is the visible part of God's creation and, through the processes of **alchemy**, the perfection of God can be actualized in the material world. The alchemist says that Santiago is the only one in danger of dying, because he himself already knows how to turn into the wind.

Santiago realizes that he has no choice but to try to actually attempt the impossible task the alchemist has set for him. In the meantime, his observations of the dying soldier and his friend reinforce the theme of the relative unimportance of death and fear. The alchemist reminds Santiago of the role of God in the continued existence of the world (another idea that suggests pantheism), and the importance of the process of alchemy to matters beyond mere metals. This seems to hint that Santiago must use one of the lessons about alchemy to achieve his goal.

During the second day, Santiago climbs to the top of the cliff next to the enemy camp. The soldiers let him go, because they are afraid of his powers. He spends the afternoon observing the desert and listening to his heart. He knows that the desert is aware of his fear, because they speak the same language.

Santiago can now listen to both his heart and the desert, and he knows that both listen to him as well. He can listen and speak, but is no closer to transforming something into an entirely different thing—like lead into gold, or himself into wind.

On the third day, the enemy chieftain meets with his counselors. He says that they should go see the boy turn himself into the wind. Santiago leads them all to the cliff where he had spent the previous day. He tells the chieftain that the process will take a while. Santiago gazes out at the desert. The desert asks him why he is back, after spending all of the previous day gazing at it. Santiago says that because the desert holds the person he loves, when he looks out at the desert he is also looking at her. He wants to return to her, and therefore he needs the desert's help. In order to survive, he must turn himself into the wind. The desert, however, does not know what love is.

On the third and final day, Santiago has an audience. Santiago still only knows how to listen or speak, so he does his best and speaks directly to the desert. In his more elevated spiritual state, abstract entities like the desert itself become "characters" with voices of their own. Santiago's argument for assistance is based on love and the importance of his own love for Fatima—but love is a foreign concept to the harsh, arid desert.

Santiago explains love as the falcons' flight over the desert sands. The falcon knows the desert intimately, but the desert says that the falcons steal away parts of the desert itself when they hurt the animals that the desert has cared for. Santiago points out that the desert creates these small creatures in order to feed the falcon, and the falcon feeds the man, and the man eventually returns to the sands of the desert. This is what love is. The desert says that it does not understand Santiago. Santiago insist that at least the desert can understand that Fatima is waiting for him in the desert, and that he must return to her. The desert says that it will offer its sands to help the wind blow, but it can't transform Santiago.The wind begins to blow, and the alchemist smiles.

Santiago tries to explain love in terms that the desert will understand, but the desert sees only the hurt inflicted by others rather than its own part in a complex web connecting all things. Love is the necessary connection between all things, and therefore (Coelho implies) love is no different than the Soul of the World, or God. The desert has a worldview that is just as narrow as any person's. The alchemist, meanwhile, sees the wind blowing as a sign that Santiago is on the right track. He is at least speaking to the elements and negotiating with them.

Santiago asks the wind for its help. The wind wants to know who taught Santiago to speak the language of the desert and of the wind. Santiago says that it was his heart. The wind is stronger than the desert, because it does not come from any specific place or go to any specific place. Humans could transform the desert by planting trees there someday, but humans could never transform the wind. The wind says that it and Santiago are two very different things. Santiago says that this is not true, because they're both made by the same hand and have the same soul. The wind says that it listened to Santiago's conversation with the alchemist, but it knows that people cannot turn themselves into wind.

The wind (like the desert) has a distinct personality and philosophy of its own, and is unable to see the "bigger picture" of its role in the entirety of creation. The wind feels that it is above human influence, and therefore above both the desert and Santiago. Santiago sees himself and the wind as equal and connected because they were both made by the same hand, but the wind is more resistant to helping Santiago because of its sense of its own superiority. It dismisses that which it cannot do.

Santiago asks that he learned to become wind for just a few moments, so that the two can discuss the possibilities of people and the wind. The wind is curious, and it wants Santiago to succeed, but it doesn't know how. Santiago makes his final plea, saying that when someone is loved, they can do anything—even turning themselves into the wind—but he still needs the wind's help to do so. The wind is a proud being, and it begins to blow fiercely. Soon, however, the wind realizes that it knows nothing of love, even though it has seen people speaking of love all over the world. The wind says that Santiago had better ask his question of heaven. It blows with all its strength, swirling sand into the air so that Santiago can look toward the heavens.

The wind is difficult, but it is at least tempted by promises of intellectual conversation. It is this curiosity, rather than a respect for Santiago or an understanding of love, that makes the wind want Santiago to succeed. The wind is proud and tries to help if only to prove its own abilities, but it must also admit defeat and acknowledge that there are others more powerful to whom Santiago should appeal. Santiago has now truly entered a world beyond that of humanity—a hierarchy of the elements and of the universe itself.

The tribesmen are overwhelmed by the wind and dust of a desert storm. Two of the tribesmen tell the enemy chieftain that they had better stop Santiago's project to be safe, but the enemy chieftain insists that he wants to see the greatness of Allah, so he wants to see this through to completion. He remembers for later the names of the men who've expressed their fear.

From an outside perspective, Santiago now seems very powerful and frightening indeed. The enemy chieftain's curiosity is about Allah, and not about Santiago. He is not afraid, because he trusts God, and he looks down on those who do not—their lack of courage in this situation is valuable knowledge to him.

Santiago next speaks to the sun, saying that he has learned from the wind that the sun knows about love. The sun replies that from its position it can see the Soul of the World. From a distance, the Soul of the World and the sun contemplate each other and love each other. The sun speaks of the creation of the world, and says that it has learned from the Soul of the World that if the hand that wrote everything had stopped on the fifth day of creation, then everything would exist in harmony. Santiago contradicts him, saying that if there hadn't been a sixth day of creation—the day on which humans were created—then nothing would be able to evolve. Because humans exist, each thing can transform itself into something better and acquire a new Personal Legend, until someday everything will become entirely part of the Soul of the World. In response, the sun shines more brightly.

The sun, unlike the desert and wind, does *understand love, because it can see the Soul of the World and it understands creation as a whole (almost). It also sees the harmony that would exist in the world without mankind, and seems almost nostalgic for this kind of state of existence. Santiago, however, argues for the importance of mankind as the source of evolution and improvement. Evolving and improving means moving closer to the Soul of the World, and Santiago imagines a future in which all creation would be truly reunited with the Soul of the World. The sun seems to agree with this idea, and at least approves of the loving sentiment behind it.*

Santiago says that **alchemy** exists so that everyone will strive for improvement, just as gold exists as lead until it can be turned into gold. Alchemy teaches everyone that when improvement is sought, everything becomes better, and love is the transformative force. The desert is static, the wind is always moving, and the sun sees everything from a remove. Santiago has now realized that the Soul of the World is not perfect, and that imperfection is why the power of love is so important. The power of love improves everything, including humans and the Soul of the World. The sun says that even though it is known as the wisest being, it cannot turn Santiago into the wind. It recommends that Santiago speak to the "hand that wrote all."

Santiago has learned the idea of evolution and improvement from alchemy, as this is what alchemists seek to do with metals in transforming them into gold. The source of evolution is love, and therefore a vision of the world in which everything joins the Soul of the World requires a lot of love. Even the Soul of the World itself can be improved through love. From this, the sun sees that only the "hand that wrote all" can change Santiago's physical human state into the wind. This evolution and transformation is thus ultimately an act of love.

The wind blows harder than ever, and tents are ripped from the ground in the tribal camp. Santiago turns to the hand that wrote all, and he feels the universe fall silent. Santiago begins to pray. It is a prayer from his heart filled with love. Santiago understands that the desert, the wind, and the sun are seeking the same thing as he is, which is to understand the signs written by God, and to see the paths before them. The hand has a reason for all that it does. Santiago reaches through the Soul of the World and discovers the Soul of God. He sees the oneness between his own soul and the Soul of God and, because of this oneness, realizes that he has the ability to perform miracles.

Santiago prays to God from a place of love and he feels that all creation is seeking the same thing as he is, which is to follow the God-given paths before it. Santiago thus truly experiences the unity of the Soul of the World, and so discovers the Soul of God, which means a unity with his own soul. Because he is now connected with God, he is able to do the miraculous things that God could do. It only takes realizing this to understand that he has always possessed the power to transform himself.

For generations, the tribesmen from that area would tell the story of the boy who was able to turn himself into the wind, and who in the process almost destroyed the military camp. When the wind stops, everyone looks at the place on the cliff where Santiago had been standing. But he is now on the other side of the camp. The tribesmen are afraid of his power, but two people are happy: the alchemist, because Santiago is his ideal student, and the enemy chieftain, because he has witnessed the glory of Allah. The next day the enemy chieftain let Santiago and the alchemist leave the camp, and he provides them with a military escort for as far as they need it.

The tribesmen react with fear when they witness Santiago's power—a power that is actually just God's power working through someone who has achieved a kind of enlightenment. Only the enemy chieftain understands this, and his happiness shows that the power of God is a positive force, one of love. The alchemist also sees Santiago's newfound awareness of his connection with God and the Soul of the World—the connection that has made this transformation possible.

By the end of the next day, the small group arrives at a Coptic monastery. The alchemist tells the escorts that they can head back to their camp, and that from this point onward Santiago needs to travel alone for the last three hours toward the **pyramids**. Santiago thanks the alchemist for teaching him the Language of the World. The alchemist says that he didn't teach Santiago anything—he only helped him to access some things he already knew. At the Coptic monastery a monk welcomes them inside. The alchemist asks if he can use the kitchen, and in the kitchen he takes lead, places it on a pan over the fire, and adds to it a sliver from the Philosopher's Stone.

Santiago credits the alchemist with having taught him, but the alchemist sees his role as less of a teacher than a "revealer"—he only pointed out the truths that Santiago already knew, because they have always existed in the world Santiago has spent time observing. The alchemist finally uses the practical skills of alchemy in the Coptic monastery. He works with trust in front of the monk, again, perceiving a person's character at a glance.

As the alchemist works, he and the monk talk about the wars in the desert. The monk feels that they're going to last for a very long time. He is sorry that the caravans have stopped coming to Giza, but he knows that God's will is what happens in the world. The alchemist then shows Santiago and the monk the lead, which has now been transformed into gold. Santiago wants to know if he'll be able to do this some day. The alchemist says that it was his Personal Legend to achieve this, but it is not Santiago's. As they depart the monastery, the alchemist gives the monk a quarter of the gold as thanks for his generosity to pilgrims. The monk feels that this payment is excessive, but the alchemist cautions him not to say so, as "life might be listening, and give you less the next time."

The monk understands the value of the idea of "maktub," although he uses the language of "God's will" to refer to those things that are meant to be. Santiago is still envious of the ability to turn lead into gold, and so he learns another valuable lesson from the alchemist: do not covet those things that are not part of one's own Personal Legend. The narrative essentially reached its climax with Santiago turning himself into the wind, so these last scenes now feel like a decompression or denouement.

The alchemist gives a quarter of the gold to Santiago, to repay him for the amount that the alchemist gave to the enemy chieftain. The alchemist saves a quarter for himself. The final quarter he gives to the monk, saying that it is for Santiago if he ever needs it. Santiago says that he is very close to his treasure now, so he will not need the gold in order to go home, but the alchemist points out that Santiago has lost his life savings twice. The alchemist says he believes in proverbs, and there's one that says that anything that happens twice will surely happen for a third time.

Santiago learns from the alchemist's rebuke of the monk and now accepts his own gift graciously. Santiago is confident in finding his treasure, but the alchemist's warning seems typically prophetic. Everything in Santiago's life seems to follow a preordained order, and so it is entirely likely that he will indeed lose his money for a third time.

Before Santiago and the alchemist bid each other farewell, the alchemist tells Santiago a story about dreams. In the story, a man who lives in ancient Rome has two sons. One son is in the military and the other son is a poet. The father has a dream in which an angel appears to him and tells him that his son's words will be remembered for generations. The father is grateful because he is proud of his sons. When the father dies soon afterward, he goes directly to heaven, where he meets the angel who appeared to him in his dream. The angel promises to grant any wish he desires. The man does not want anything for himself, but he wants to see his son's words being remembered by others.

The alchemist leaves Santiago with a parting story—another parable meant to teach him a lesson. In the story, the old man's Personal Legend is not mentioned, but it seems he must have fulfilled it because he has lived and died with happiness and peace, rather than fear and frustration. The old man's selfless nature is also evident in his last wish, which doesn't concern himself at all, but only his son.

The angel takes him far into the future, into a room surrounded by thousands of people speaking. The man is moved to tears, and asks the angel which of his son's poems the people are reciting. The angel explains that the poems that his poet son wrote were well loved during his day, but eventually they were forgotten. The words he has just heard were the words of his son who was in the military.

As might be expected, there is a twist at the end of the alchemist's story—just like Santiago's treasure and the resolution to his quest might be different than what he has expected and imagined.

The angel explains that the man's son had sought a rabbi whom he'd heard was able to cure all illnesses. While seeking this rabbi, the son learned that the rabbi was the Son of God. This experience caused him to convert to the faith of the rabbi. When he meets the Son of God, the son tells him that one of his servants is very ill. As the son speaks to the rabbi, he is overwhelmed by the knowledge that the rabbi is in fact the son of God. He says to the Son of God, "my Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only speak a word and my servant will be healed." The alchemist ends his story by saying that everyone on earth plays an important role, even if he doesn't know it. Then the alchemist and Santiago bid each other farewell.

The reason for the son's words being remembered is that they reached a fundamental human experience that many could relate to. When faced with God himself, the man spoke of his own worthlessness. This sensation of being overwhelmed by the greatness of God is relatable and important to others, and is in fact yet another story from the Bible. The alchemist points out that the father of the military man had a role in all this as well, even if he could not have foreseen it, and could not comprehend it until after his death.

Santiago rides alone through the desert, listening to his heart. The alchemist had told him "where your treasure is there also will be your heart," but as he travels Santiago's heart is speaking of other things. It speaks with pride of a shepherd leaving his **flock** to follow a dream. It speaks of Personal Legends, and of journeys. Finally, as he climbs a dune, Santiago's heart says to him to be aware of the place where he is brought to tears, as that is the place where his treasure is. Santiago climbs the dunes and sees a full moon rising in the sky, which shows that it has been a month since he left the **oasis**. At the top of the dunes, Santiago can see the **Egyptian Pyramids** illuminated by the full moon.

Santiago listens to his heart in order to find his treasure, but his heart is more focused on the quest than the end goal. The way in which his heart reveals the place to look for his treasure shows the importance of emotion in Santiago's quest. He will be brought to tears at the right place, a demonstration of pure emotion that is not shameful, but important. The appearance of the pyramids is moving, but we already sense that the journey itself was Santiago's Personal Legend more so than his arrival at this destination.

Santiago falls to his knees and cries, thanking God for making him follow his Personal Legend and for having him meet a king, a merchant, an Englishmen, and an alchemist along the way, as well as Fatima. Santiago realizes that as he has sought his Personal Legend, he has also learned everything he would need to know, and has experienced all of his dreams—and now he is on the verge of finding his treasure.

Santiago is brought to tears because of his overwhelming gratitude to fate/God/the Soul of the World, and he now seems to see all that his quest has already given him—even without any "treasure" yet. When all the supporting characters are listed like this they seem even more archetypal—like lessons and experiences existing for Santiago's sake, more than living humans in their own right.

In the sand Santiago sees a scarab beetle, and remembers that these beetles are a symbol of God. Because of this omen, he begins to dig into the sand at the place where the beetle was. He digs and digs, but he finds nothing. His hands hurt and he is exhausted, but he is listening to his heart, which tells him to dig at the place where he cried.

The scarab beetle (a sacred creature to the ancient Egyptians) is a mysterious omen that at first seems to be leading Santiago on a false trail. But he does not give up, because by now he has learned to entirely trust in omens and in his own heart.

Suddenly several people approach Santiago and demand to know what he is doing. The people explain that they are refugees from the tribal wars, and they desperately need money. One of them grabs Santiago and drags him out of the hole that he has dug. They search through Santiago's bags, and find the gold that the alchemist gave him. They make Santiago dig, thinking that he has hidden gold in the ground, but no treasure is revealed. At dawn the refugees beat Santiago.

The refugees of the tribal wars are figures deserving both sympathy and criticism. They show another side of the tribal wars—the fact that people have lost homes and livelihoods through the violence others. But they also treat Santiago cruelly, turning the violence they have experienced on another person.

Finally Santiago yells that he is digging for treasure, and he tells his attackers that he had dreamed of finding treasure at this place. The leader of the refugees tells the others to leave Santiago. As the others depart, the leader explains that Santiago should not be so stupid. He says that two years before, he himself had a recurring dream on that very spot. In the dream he saw **an abandoned church** that sheltered shepherds and **sheep**. The dream told him that if he dug at the roots of the tree growing through the center of the church, he would find a hidden treasure. The leader of the refugees did not go in search of this treasure, however, because it was just a dream. The refugees leave, and Santiago laughs aloud, because now he knows the location of his treasure.

Santiago, seemingly at the end of his rope, finally admits the truth about his search, and the leader of the refugees responds. The dream he reveals to Santiago is the parallel dream to Santiago's own (Santiago dreamed of the pyramids while asleep in the abandoned church). Unlike Santiago, however, the refugee is dismissive of dreams, and doesn't even consider pursuing his own treasure. He does not believe in omens and he will not follow them, instead trusting only his own rationality. Because of this, it's suggested that he will continue to suffer and struggle—even though his decision seems entirely reasonable, especially considering the desperate circumstances of his life (circumstances Santiago has never had to face). Santiago, on the other hand, has learned all his lessons in the right order, and knows an omen from God when he sees one.

EPILOGUE

Night is falling as Santiago reaches **the abandoned church**. The tree is still growing up through the broken roof, and he remembers the time he slept there and had the dream about the **pyramids**. This time he does not have his **sheep**, but he has a shovel. He thinks of the night in the desert when he and the alchemist sat outside the alchemist's tent and looked at the stars. He realizes that God has chosen a strange way to show him his treasure, but because he went on his quest to Egypt, Santiago met so many people that he would not otherwise have encountered.

Santiago now returns to Spain and to the place where his story began. This physical return brings everything full circle, and the abandoned church acts as a bookend for the novel. The church is a holy place, but also a natural place (because of the tree growing through it). The holy and the natural have always been connected in Santiago's story, and have suggested a more universal nature of spirituality that is meant to transcend individual religious dogma. Santiago now sees that his quest was valuable in itself, despite the fact that it ends where it began. On one level, the book has basically been a longer, more detailed version of the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote, "Life is a journey, not a destination."

Santiago falls asleep and wakes up when the sun is high. He then shouts at the sky, "you knew the whole story!" He sees that God even prepared for his return journey with the gold that the alchemist left with the monk. Santiago asks God if he couldn't have spared him from the laughter of the monk when he returned to the monastery in tatters. A voice on the wind replies that he could not, because this allowed him to see the beautiful **pyramids**. Santiago smiles and begins to dig. In half an hour he has revealed a chest of Spanish gold coins, along with precious stones and gold masks. This treasure was forgotten long ago.

Santiago now speaks directly to God, realizing the irony of his own inability to see the big picture, while God always could. After all that Santiago has experienced and the true love that he seems to have found along the way, a treasure that is only gold and jewels almost seems like a letdown—something entirely worldly as a reward for a journey that was almost entirely spiritual.

Santiago takes **Urim and Thummim** out of his bag and adds them to the chest. They are also part of his treasure, and they remind him of the old king Melchizedek. Santiago reflects that life is generous to those who seek out their Personal Legend. He remembers that he needs to go to Tarifa to give one tenth of his treasure to the fortune-teller, as he had promised long ago.

Santiago sees that he has received such great generosity and blessings from God because he has purely pursued the path to his Personal Legend, and has not let himself hesitate or fall into a trap of fear. He does the right thing by fulfilling his promise, and he has learned the value of commitment. This is a well-ordered, satisfying, and "happy" ending, but as Coelho clearly intends the book as a kind of parable or moral lesson, it is also somewhat problematic, as some critics have noted. Taken to its logical conclusion, the lesson of the book seems to imply that if someone is unhappy, unfulfilled, or even poor, there is nothing to be done about it—it is either their own fault for not properly pursuing their "Personal Legend," or it has just been "written" that way.

The wind begins to blow, and it brings with it a familiar scent of perfume, as well as a kiss from far away. Santiago smiles and says, "I'm coming, Fatima."

The book ends with the suggestion that Santiago will return to Fatima and prove that their love is indeed pure and true, and is therefore incorruptible (like the metals the alchemist compared it to). It's also assumed, of course, that Fatima has been faithfully waiting for Santiago all this time. The two lovers are connected through the Soul of the World, even when they are hundreds of miles apart. Santiago has learned all his lessons and achieved his treasure, and now he can return to the oasis—that place of peace and life in the middle of a war-torn desert—and live happily ever after.

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