

The Alchemist (Coelho)

[The Alchemist](#) is one of the most important literary phenomena of the 20th century, selling more than 30 million copies worldwide. The book has been translated into over 67 languages and tops the all-time best-seller list in 18 countries. The overwhelming success of *The Alchemist* can be ascribed to a few different things. First, the story of [Santiago](#) the shepherd is one of everyday spirituality, the kind of spirituality that people can use in their day-to-day lives. One of the central messages of the book is that spirituality is not something *separate* from an individual's need to realize his/her dreams. In fact, the things that one's heart truly desires are in fact messages from the universe. It is in pursuing these things to the best of one's ability that one is most truly alive. Second, *The Alchemist* is written in a straightforward style that allows its simple beauty to shine through. In this way, *The Alchemist* participates in a long tradition of religious and morality stories, such as fairy tales and children's stories, whose goal is to convey a practical life lesson. The disarmingly simple style, paired with the book's non-denominational spiritual lesson, explains its appeal to readers of all tastes and people of all spiritual inclinations.

The Alchemist (Coelho) Summary

The Alchemist tells the story of a young shepherd named Santiago who is able to find a treasure beyond his wildest dreams. Along the way, he learns to listen to his heart and, more importantly, realizes that his dreams, or his Personal Legend, are not just his but part of the Soul of the Universe.

Santiago is a humble shepherd whose desires are few—he wants to be free to roam with his sheep, to have some wine in his wineskin and a book in his bag. Fate intervenes, however, in the form of the recurring dream of a great treasure hidden thousands of miles away at the base of the Egyptian Pyramids. When Santiago meets Melchizedek, a strange wise man who claims he is a king from a far-off land, he decides to seek his treasure. The next day, Santiago sells his sheep and embarks to Africa to pursue his dream.

Upon arriving in Africa, though, it becomes apparent that things will not be as easy as he thought. The first day Santiago is in Tangiers, he is robbed and left completely alone, unable to speak a single word of Arabic. At first Santiago contemplates giving up and turning around. He remembers the words of the wise man, though, and decides to carry on—getting a job at a local crystal shop. After working at the crystal shop for a year, learning much about life and about his Personal Legend, Santiago earns enough money to buy a new flock of sheep and return home. At the last minute, though, Santiago decides to risk it all and join a caravan to Egypt.

Once in the caravan, Santiago meets an Englishman who has come all the way to Africa to seek a renowned alchemist. As they travel through the desert, the

Englishman tells Santiago about the secrets of alchemy. Santiago finds the Englishman's ideas to be very similar to Melchizedek's. They both speak of a Soul of the World to which we are all connected and of the necessity of following our heart's true desires or our Personal Legend. Santiago, however, prefers to learn these secrets by observing the world, while the Englishman prefers to learn from complex books. While they travel, they begin to hear rumors of a coming tribal war.

When they finally arrive at the Al-Fayoum oasis—the home of the titular Alchemist—Santiago meets a beautiful girl named [Fatima](#) with whom he immediately falls in love. He discovers that love, like the Personal Legend, comes directly from the Soul of the World. While walking in the desert, Santiago has a vision of an upcoming battle. He rushes back to warn the elders at the oasis and, when his vision is confirmed, they offer him a position as a counselor. Santiago considers staying at the oasis with Fatima, but the Alchemist finds Santiago and tells him that he will lead Santiago to his treasure.

Once again on the move, the Alchemist teaches Santiago to listen to his heart. Hearts can be treacherous, but the best way to keep them from fooling you is to listen to them intently. Almost to the pyramids, Santiago and the Alchemist are taken prisoner by a warring tribe. The Alchemist tells the tribesmen that Santiago is a powerful magician who can turn himself into the wind. The tribesmen are impressed and will spare the lives of the men if Santiago can do it. The only problem is that Santiago has no idea what he is doing. After three days of meditating, Santiago uses his knowledge of the Soul of the World to ask the elements to help him. First he asks the desert, then he asks the wind, then he asks the sun and, finally, he asks the Soul of the World. Immediately, the wind whips up, and Santiago disappears and reappears on the other side of the camp.

The Alchemist takes his leave of Santiago, who continues on to the Pyramids. Once there, Santiago is attacked by robbers. Asked what he is doing there, Santiago replies that he had a dream of a treasure buried at the base of the Pyramids. One of the robbers laughs at him, and says that he has had the exact same dream, except that in his the treasure was buried in Spain. Santiago realizes that the treasure was back in Spain the entire time.

The story then jumps forward in time and finds Santiago digging a hole at the base of the tree where he had had his first dream. Sure enough, he finds a trunk full of gold—enough for him and Fatima to live happily for a long time.

Characters

Santiago

Santiago is the protagonist of the *The Alchemist*. Born in a small town in Andalusia, Santiago attends the seminary as a boy but longs to travel the world. He finally gets the courage to ask his father's permission to become a shepherd so that he can travel the fields of Andalusia. One day, he meets a mysterious man in the town of Tarifa, who sends him on a journey to the other side of Africa.

Santiago is a curious boy whose open mind makes him particularly suited to finding his Personal Legend. He also values his freedom very highly, which is why he became a shepherd and why he is reticent to get involved in things which threaten his freedom. In the end, he realizes that playing it safe is often more threatening to his freedom than taking a risk.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek is the king of Salem, a mysterious far-off land. Melchizedek appears to Santiago in the town square of Tarifa, where he tells Santiago about the Soul of the World and his Personal Legend for the first time. Melchizedek always appears to people who are trying to live their Personal Legend, even if they don't know it. While he appears at first to be dressed in common Arab dress, at one point he pulls aside his cloak to reveal a gold breastplate encrusted with precious stones. He also gives Santiago the magical stones Urim and Thummim.

The Englishman

Santiago meets the Englishman on the caravan to Al-Fayoum. The Englishman is trying to become a great alchemist and is traveling to Al-Fayoum to study with a famous alchemist who is rumored to be over 200 years old and to have the ability to turn any metal into gold. Santiago learns much about alchemy from the Englishman, who lends Santiago his books while they travel across the Sahara.

Fatima

A beautiful girl who lives at the Al-Fayoum oasis. Santiago falls in love with her at the well there. He and Fatima talk everyday for several weeks, and finally he asks her to marry him. Fatima, however, insists that he seek out his Personal Legend before they marry. This perplexes Santiago, but the Alchemist teaches him that true love never gets in the way of one's Personal Legend. If it does, then it is not true love.

The Alchemist

Very powerful alchemist who lives at the Al-Fayoum oasis in Egypt. Initially, Santiago hears about him through the Englishman, but eventually Santiago reveals himself to be the Alchemist's true disciple. The Alchemist dresses in all black and uses a falcon to hunt for game. The Alchemist is also in possession of the Elixir of Life and the Philosopher's Stone.

The Shopkeeper

Gives Santiago a job in Tangiers after he has been robbed. Santiago takes the job at the crystal shop and learns much about the shopkeeper's attitude toward life and the importance of dreaming. The shopkeeper, while generally afraid to take risks, is a very kind man and understands Santiago's quest - sometimes more than Santiago himself.

This is the case when the shopkeeper tells Santiago that he will not return to Spain, since it is not his fate.

Prologue

The Alchemist, a character who will not be introduced until much later in the narrative, finds a book that retells the myth of Narcissus. The myth of Narcissus traditionally tells how a youth, whose name was Narcissus, loved his own image so much that he spent days looking at his own reflection in a lake. One day, he was so infatuated with himself that he lost his concentration, slipped and drowned in the lake. A flower grew by where he fell and this plant came to be called the narcissus.

The author of the book the Alchemist finds is different, though. It continues by telling how the goddess of the forest went to the lake after Narcissus had died and found it converted into a lake of tears; the lake was weeping for Narcissus. The lake missed Narcissus because, in the reflection of his eyes, the lake could contemplate itself. This version of the myth makes the Alchemist very happy.

Analysis

This prologue introduces several elements which will come into play later in the narrative. First, the reader can see the attribution of human traits to inanimate objects – in this case, the lake that cries. This both sets the magical tone of the narrative and highlights the interrelation of all things, animate and inanimate, that forms one of the main themes of the book. Second, the story of the Narcissus highlights the question of selfishness, a question which is at the center of *The Alchemist*. Is it possible to pursue one's own personal desires while living a good life? In the case of Santiago, the answer is a resounding yes – making the image of Narcissus (who become a flower through his selfishness) especially apt.

Section One

The story opens with the main character, the shepherd Santiago, arriving at an abandoned church with a sycamore growing in it in the Spanish region of Andalusia. He decides to stay the night at the church and corrals his herd into the church grounds. He falls asleep using the book that he keeps with him at all times as his pillow. During the night, he has a dream that he has had several times before, a dream he has never been able to fully understand. While waking his herd, he realizes that he is very close to the animals; they operate on the same schedule and he calls them all by name, convinced that they understand his conversation with them. They are very simple creatures, though, wanting only food and water. Recently all of this thoughts and conversations with the sheep have been about a girl he met a year ago, at the town that is his next destination. She is the daughter of a merchant and he has been thinking about her ever since he left.

Remembering their first meeting, Santiago reminisces about how he went to the shop of the girl's father to sell him some wool. While waiting for the shopkeeper to see him, the boy sat down to read a book. A voice from behind him said, "I didn't know shepherds knew how to read." The voice was that of the shopkeeper's daughter, a beautiful Andalusian girl whose features recalled the Moorish influence of the region. The girl and Santiago waited for two hours, during which time they told each other about their experiences, she in the town and he in the fields. The girl asked him why he was a shepherd if he had been to school and knew how to read. Santiago changed the subject and continued the conversation. He felt something which he had never felt before: the desire to stay in one place forever. Unfortunately, at that moment, the shopkeeper appeared, bought four sheep worth of wool and told the boy to come back in a year.

Leaving the church in the morning, Santiago is both excited and apprehensive about seeing the girl. She could have forgotten him. As they set out, he begins to think about the lives of the sheep, and how sheep don't make any decisions. They want only food and water and rely on Santiago for that. Surprised at his feelings of mild resentment toward the animals, Santiago decides his recurring dream has made him uneasy. When he gets to the town, he resolves, he will tell the girl why he knows how to read, how he went to seminary and was originally set to be a priest, and one day got the courage to tell his family that he would rather travel the world as a shepherd. As we learn from Santiago's memories, his father at first tried to convince him to stay, pointing out that plenty of travelers had passed through their lands and said that they would like to live there. In the end, however, he capitulated and gave Santiago his blessing and three old gold coins to buy his flock. Santiago could thus see that his father himself had once had dreams of traveling the world.

Santiago's lifestyle as a shepherd has provided him with a lot of freedom. All he has to do is allow his sheep to lead the way for a while and he will always find a new path. The difference between him and the sheep, though, is that the sheep never know they are on a new path. Once again, all they think about is food and water. Santiago realizes that dreaming about what you don't have is what makes life interesting.

Analysis

Part I of the novel, which ends with Santiago accepting a job at the crystal shop, includes the main character's introduction, acceptance of challenge and initial setback. The reader is also introduced, in an unexplained form, to several of the main terms that reappear and are explained throughout the story, among them "Personal Legend" and "Soul of the World." This section also introduces several of the main themes of the narrative: love, in the false-love of Santiago for the merchant's daughter;

dreams, in the form of Santiago's dream of the treasure; fate, in the form of Melchizedek's intervention in Santiago's life.

The narrative arc of *The Alchemist* follows a relatively common formula. The hero leaves home to pursue a quest, is tested three times, and, upon succeeding, returns home as a victor. What makes *The Alchemist* stand apart, though, is that there are essentially two parallel quests going on in the narrative. The first is a rather familiar search for treasure. This quest, though, is merely the metaphorical double to Santiago's other journey, which is to discover his own Personal Legend. What is particularly interesting about this section is the way that (similarly to this narrative dichotomy) it straddles the great geographic division that forms the main dialectic of the physical story – namely, that between Spain and Africa. While the end of this section could have very easily come when Santiago leaves Andalusia for Africa, it instead concludes when Santiago seems to have resigned himself to merely make enough money to return to Spain. This division suggests that the main drama in the narrative is not a physical adventure—characterized by exotic lands, physical challenges or vicious enemies—but rather an interior drama (of Santiago overcoming his own fears and harnessing the willpower to achieve his Personal Legend).

The book Santiago carries with him at all times has several symbolic resonances. It distinguishes him from being a common shepherd. The merchant girl knows that he is extraordinary because he can read. The book is a source of knowledge and freedom, allowing Santiago a different, broader outlook on the world. Books also, however, propagate certain misleading ideas, as argued by Melchizedek when he claims that Santiago's book endorses the world's greatest lie. Later, the Englishman will be blocked from realizing the truths of alchemy because he is too tied to his complicated books. Fate is often described metaphorically as a book that was written by one hand. The “book of fate” would thus be the only book capable of telling the whole truth.

This section also introduces the Moors, who will recur throughout the novel. The merchant girl, of whom Santiago dreams, is remarkable for her “moorish” features. This foreshadows both Santiago's love for Fatima and the journey he will undertake to Africa, from whence the Moors came.

Section Two

Summary

Once Santiago gets to Tarifa, his last stop before the city where the shopkeeper's daughter lives, he goes to see an old gypsy woman who interprets dreams, with the hope that she will help him understand his own recurring dream. When reliving the dream, just as the child is about to show Santiago the location of the treasure, Santiago wakes up. The Gypsy woman tells him that this treasure is real and that he must go to

the Pyramids, an interpretation for which she charges him one-tenth of this future treasure.

Upon leaving the Gypsy's house, Santiago sits in the Plaza to read a book, where he meets an old man who is eager to strike up a conversation. It turns out that the old man not only knows how to read but has read the book that Santiago is struggling through. The man reveals himself to be Melchizedek, the King of Salem, and he introduces Santiago to what he calls "the world's greatest lie." The World's Greatest Lie states that fate prevents one from achieving his/her Personal Legend. Everyone has a Personal Legend, or something which he/she has wanted to achieve his/her entire life. Personal Legends come from the Soul of the World and this Soul of the World conspires to help everyone achieve them. Unfortunately, fear and routine get in the way. Melchizedek explains to Santiago that he appears to those who truly want to realize their Personal Legends: sometimes he appears as a stone, sometime he appears as a king. Melchizedek seems to be able to read Santiago's mind and promises to tell him about the treasure in his dream if he gives him one-tenth of his sheep.

After much deliberation, Santiago decides that his sheep, the merchant's daughter and the fields of Andalusia were just steps on his way to his Personal Legend, and so he decides to sell his flock and gives six to Melchizedek right away. Melchizedek takes the sheep and advises Santiago to always follow the omens, for they are the language of the universe. Melchizedek also gives Santiago two stones, a black stone called Urim (meaning "yes") and a white stone called Thummim (meaning "no"). Santiago is to consult these if he cannot understand the omens. Santiago buys a ticket from Tarifa to Africa and sets sail to find his treasure and his Personal Legend.

Upon arriving in Tangiers, Santiago realizes that his journey will be a lot more difficult than he expected. The problem? He doesn't speak Arabic. Sitting in a bar alone, he is approached by a young man who speaks Spanish and offers to help him get to the Pyramids. The young man takes Santiago to buy a camel and manages to escape with all of Santiago's money in the confusion of the marketplace. Santiago weeps with despair, but he asks the stones Urim and Thummim if the Melchizedek's blessing is still with him. They answer 'Yes', and Santiago resolves to continue his journey.

Wandering the streets of Tangiers, Santiago comes across a crystal shop that has fallen on hard times. After Santiago cleans the pieces in the front window, the owner offers him a job. The owner tells Santiago that he will pay Santiago enough to save up for a new flock of sheep and a passage back to Andalusia. Santiago agrees and takes the job.

Analysis

This part of *The Alchemist* finds Santiago changing the course of his life by deciding to give up his profession – a sort of safe haven for him – and to pursue his dream. This is the first of many episodes in the book wherein the desire to play it safe and to stick with what one knows almost holds Santiago back. Ironically, Santiago took a risk in becoming a shepherd in the first place. He wanted the freedom to roam the countryside and to get to know different regions, different towns. But after meeting Melchizedek, Santiago realizes that those things which seemed to offer him freedom have come to imprison him.

Also introduced in this section is the theme of dreams as meaningful and portentous. We have heard of Santiago's dream before, but only now do we hear a possible interpretation of it; only now does it become a call for action. The Gypsy claims that dreams are a language used by the Soul of the World to communicate with people. They are part of the fabric of a universal language that binds beings together.

Through this description of dreams, and the events that unfold in the narrative, Coelho's magical, fairy-tale style takes shape and comes to the fore. Melchizedek is himself a fantastical character, who knows a positively supernatural amount of things about Santiago's personal life, has magical stones to offer, and claims to be able to turn himself into different things. In this way, *The Alchemist* shows a certain amount of affinity with magical realism – a genre of literature wherein fantastic things happen but the characters react to them in psychologically realistic ways. This magical tone is one of the dominant stylistic characteristics of the novel.

When Santiago first travels to Africa, the reader sees his vaguely skeptical attitude toward the Muslims he meets. While in the bar, he hears the call to prayer and watches the Muslims prostrate themselves on the ground. He remarks that their actions are those of infidels. He also calls to mind St. Matamoros (literally 'kills moors') who is depicted on a mighty steed slaying the infidels at his feet. As the novel continues, these views will change, and the image of St. Matamoros will later recur in an altogether different circumstance.

Part Two, Section One

Summary

After working at the crystal shop for a month, Santiago suggests that the shop owner build a display case for the crystal to attract new customers. The owner seems resistant to change, as if he is afraid of success. The owner then tells Santiago that, although he has always dreamed of making the pilgrimage to Mecca, he knows he will never do it.

He tells Santiago that he is afraid that, once he achieves his dream, he will have no need to go on living. Santiago ends up convincing him on certain issues, and within the year Santiago spends working at the shop, the owner makes several changes that improve business. At the end of the year Santiago resolves to take the money he has saved, buy a flock of sheep and return to Spain. As he takes his leave, he asks the shopkeeper for his blessing; the shopkeeper gives it, but tells Santiago that he knows he will not return to Spain. The shopkeeper reiterates that he himself will likewise never go to Mecca. He claims that this is maktub – or written by God. Santiago realizes that while he is far from home, he is actually closer than ever to the Pyramids and the treasure. He resolves to take a chance and join a caravan across the desert in search of his treasure.

When Santiago goes to the stable to take the caravan, he meets an Englishman, who is in search of a famous alchemist living in Al-Fayoum oasis. The Englishman is obsessed with finding the common language of all the world and has spent the majority of his inheritance traveling and studying science, religion, and finally, alchemy.

While Santiago and the Englishman are waiting for the caravan to leave, Santiago takes out Urim and Thummim and the Englishman immediately recognizes them. He carries the same two stones in his own pocket. He goes on to tell Santiago that it is not accidental that the two of them met on the caravan. Coincidences and omens are the universal language that the whole world can understand. It is the task of alchemy to decipher this language. Santiago realizes that the series of events which led him to this point – meeting Melchizedek getting robbed and happening upon the shopkeeper and the crystal shop – were not accidental or random at all but were signs that he is nearing his Personal Legend.

The caravan begins to move across the desert, and Santiago learns many things from the English alchemist and the guides of the caravan. The desert is enormous and dangerous, and the guides teach Santiago about listening to its language of omens. The Englishman refers to the Soul of the World and describes it as the principle that governs all things. When we have an intuition or truly want something, we are immersed in the Soul of the World. This is not a strictly human gift, though; everything on the face of the earth has a soul and a Personal Legend. Santiago is interested and asks to borrow the Englishman's books about alchemy.

Reading the Englishman's books, Santiago learns more about alchemy. He finds out that the goal of alchemy is the Master Work. The Master Work is part liquid and part solid; the liquid is called the Elixir of Life and the solid is called the Philosopher's Stone. The Englishman's books tell the stories of all the famous alchemists who dedicated their lives to realizing their Personal Legends. As he reads on, Santiago realizes that he and the English alchemist are pursuing the same thing, but Santiago prefers to read the omens of the world in his everyday life instead of in old musty books.

While the caravan moves across the desert, there is a war brewing amongst the tribes of the region. It is becoming more and more dangerous by the day, but the caravan has no choice but to carry on and hope for the best. From the stoic guides of the caravan, Santiago learns the value of concentrating on the present.

Analysis

Part II of *The Alchemist* shows Santiago encountering two more setbacks before he can reach his destination. Part of the artistry of Coelho's narrative lies in the way Santiago's setbacks, or complications, become progressively more and more complicated. While the first setback – getting robbed in Tangiers – is admittedly serious, it is also relatively prosaic. Looking ahead, the second setback, Santiago's love for Fatima, is more complicated because love is not usually presented as a setback. Santiago, however, contemplates suspending his quest, something not even being robbed in a foreign land could do, to stay with Fatima. The reader sees, once again, Santiago pondering his options and relying, once again, on outside intervention to make his decision. Even though Fatima tells Santiago that she wants him to continue, he is still undecided. At this point, fate intervenes both in the form of the omen in the desert and the alchemist telling Santiago his future of resentment and regret if he doesn't pursue his dream. As a result, once again, Santiago continues.

The final complication, Santiago's feat of turning himself into the wind, is different in a few ways. First of all, it is by far the most profound. Whereas the first two were essentially physical and personal setbacks, the last one is spiritual in nature. Santiago comes to realize that he and God are one soul and that his soul is a small part of the greater Soul of the World. Secondly, the last complication is different in that Santiago overcomes it entirely by himself. There is no intervention on the part of the Alchemist or anyone else. This is in keeping with the dual-narrative modality at play in *The Alchemist* – a physical narrative and arc paralleled by a spiritual equivalent. The scene wherein Santiago turns himself into the wind is the climax of the spiritual journey, just as the discovery of the treasure is the climax of the physical journey.

By working at the crystal shop, Santiago learns many lessons. One of the most important is that it does not take an exterior force to prevent one from realizing one's dreams. The shopkeeper is actively trying to avoid achieving his dream, because he believes that if he achieves it he will have nothing to aspire to. It is with this in mind that Santiago decides to continue on his own quest.

The theme of fate is touched upon again in the meeting of the Englishman and Santiago. In many ways, these two form two sides of the same character – the seeker of knowledge. In many ways, they are both seeking a treasure: the Englishman wants to learn how to turn lead into gold and Santiago is seeking a buried treasure. Both of them,

however, realize that there is much more at stake than just material wealth. They are different in that the Englishman insists on learning everything from books. These books form the basis of all of his knowledge, so much so that the real world is secondary. Santiago, on the other hand, is constantly learning by observing the world, the desert, the omens of life. The characters are, however, intimately joined by fate.

Part Two, Section Two

Summary

Finally the caravan reaches the oasis, where the alchemist awaits its arrival. (He has known from reading the various omens of the desert that there is someone in the caravan who is seeking him out.) It makes the old alchemist happy to see the travelers arrive, to see them so elated at the sight of palm trees after so much sand.

The war amongst the tribes makes the desert too dangerous to pass, so the caravan must stay at the oasis indefinitely. This gives the Englishman time to seek out the alchemist. With Santiago helping him, the Englishman begins to question people about the alchemist's whereabouts. In the process of asking, Santiago meets a beautiful girl at the well and falls immediately in love. He realizes that when you are in love you hear the language of the Soul of the World perfectly. Her name is Fatima and he begins to meet her at the well every day and tell her his story and of all the things that he has learned. Finally, he tells Fatima he wants to marry her. He even thinks about giving up his quest to the Pyramids to be with her. Fatima, however, tells Santiago that she understands his need to go find the treasure, and that she in fact wants him to realize his goal. The women of the desert, she explains, are proud of their men's freedom. This confuses Santiago, who is unable to separate love and possession. While thinking about this alone on the outskirts of the oasis, Santiago has a vision of an invading army. After consulting one of the guides of the caravan, Santiago resolves to tell the chiefs of the oasis what the omens of the desert have shown him.

Santiago tells the chiefs and, after some deliberation, they decide to ready themselves for war – even though this is against the tradition of the oasis, which is usually considered neutral ground. The chiefs make a stipulation: if the enemy arrives, the chief will give Santiago a piece of gold for every 10 enemies slain; if Santiago's vision is wrong, he will be killed. Walking home from his meeting with the chiefs Santiago is pensive but sure that he has made the right decision. Suddenly, he is assailed by a man with a falcon on his shoulder, dressed all in black, riding a white horse. The man holds a sword to Santiago's head and demands to know how he knew of the coming of the army. Santiago, frightened, explains to the man about the omens of the desert and his Personal Legend, concluding that he had no choice. The man understands completely, to Santiago's surprise, and takes his leave, telling Santiago to come see him if he

survives the coming days. As the horseman rides away, Santiago realizes that he has just met the alchemist.

The next day, 500 armed tribesmen enter the oasis as Santiago has predicted. The men of the oasis, duly warned, kill all of the intruders and the chieftain of the oasis awards Santiago 50 pieces of gold and asks him to become the oasis's counselor.

That night, Santiago seeks out the alchemist and finds his tent. The alchemist tells Santiago to prove that he can read the language of omens by finding life in the desert. Santiago trusts his horse to guide him to life, and they find a snake which the alchemist neutralizes with a spell. Satisfied, the alchemist offers to lead Santiago across the desert to the treasure. Santiago is conflicted because he wants to stay at the oasis with Fatima. The alchemist responds that "love never keeps a man from pursuing his personal legend. If he abandons that pursuit, it's because it wasn't true love...the love speaks the Language of the World." (120) Santiago decides to leave the next day with the alchemist.

Analysis

Over the course of this section, the alchemist implicitly chooses Santiago as his disciple over the Englishman. This is counterintuitive, considering that the Englishman is much more educated in the secrets of alchemy than Santiago. The alchemist, though, shows that the intuitive method of Santiago is preferable to the intellectual pursuit of the Englishman. Santiago has been trying to learn about the universe by diving into it, experiencing it, seeing, hearing, and tasting it – not just reading about it.

This section also showcases a substantial increase in Santiago's powers. He is now able to use his skills of divination to protect those that he cares about. He is tempted, however, to use these powers, acquired in order to pursue his Personal Legend, for short-term gain. In this way, the attraction of the position as a counselor of the oasis is an ethical dilemma. Santiago would be truly squandering his abilities if he were to use them for something as short-sighted as such a position. It can also be asked whether he would even retain said powers if he stayed at the oasis, since he would have given up on the sincere commitment which allowed him to achieve such powers in the first place. Love comes to the fore in this part of the narrative, but it is complicated by the book's philosophy. Fatima, Santiago's love interest, tells him that she would rather him achieve his Personal Legend than stay by her side. Her reasoning is that she loves Santiago and therefore must love his dreams as well. The alchemist, who encourages Santiago to pursue his Personal Legend, has a slightly different logic. He claims that, although Santiago will be extremely happy for a while, he will come to resent Fatima for preventing him from achieving his dreams. It is better to pursue those dreams than to allow them to fester. The other side of this logic is that the alchemist claims that there can be no conflict between true love and one's Personal Legend. This is because true

love is defined as that love which does get in the way of the Personal Legend. In this way, the novel sets up the Personal Legend as the central organizing principle of a spiritually fulfilled life. Once the Personal Legend is identified and committed to, all other things will become clear.

Summary and Analysis of Part Two, Section Three

Summary

After reaffirming his love to Fatima, Santiago sets across the desert with the alchemist. They travel in silence, eating the game that the alchemist's falcon brings them. Santiago grows restless, is hungry for more of the alchemist's secrets. The alchemist explains that Santiago has learned much, but the one thing that he has left to learn cannot be taught. He must learn it for himself. In the beginning, the alchemist explains, the secrets of the universe were known to all, but men have been complicating things because they seek the treasure of their Personal Legends, but do not wish to live their Personal Legends. The alchemist advises Santiago to listen to his heart.

The two travel cautiously now, because they are nearing the area with the most warring tribes. Santiago listens to his heart and finds it agitated. It begins to tell him stories about the Soul of the World – about others who have failed to find their fortune. It is scared and wants to go back to Fatima. Santiago tells the alchemist that his heart is treasonous, that it does not want him to continue. "Treason is a blow that comes unexpectedly," comes the reply. "If you know your heart well, it will never be able to do that to you." (129)

As they travel, Santiago listens to his heart and eventually comes to be at peace with it. As the journey nears its end, Santiago tells the alchemist that he wants to know some secrets of alchemy. The alchemist tells Santiago that he already knows many important secrets; he knows that one must listen to the Soul of the World to find one's treasure. Every thing on earth, even minerals, has a Personal Legend. This is why alchemists can change any metal into gold: they are simply helping the metal achieve its Personal Legend.

The war finally catches up with the travelers and they are taken captive by a warring tribe. The tribesmen take them for spies and threaten to kill them. To save his and Santiago's lives, the alchemist gives the tribesmen all of Santiago's money and tells the tribesman that Santiago is a powerful wizard who can turn himself into the wind and destroy them. The tribesmen don't believe him, but give Santiago three days to prove himself.

Santiago panics because he has no idea how to turn himself into the wind. The alchemist seems unconcerned. For three days, Santiago goes up on a cliff and contemplates the desert, listening to his heart. Finally, on the third day, he goes to the

very top of the cliff and uses his heart to talk to the Desert – since they both speak the Language of the World. He asks the Desert to help him turn himself into the Wind, because he is love with a girl and wants desperately to go back to her, but the Desert does not know how. Next he asks the Wind, but the Wind does not know what love is. Finally he asks the Sun, who knows what love is, but cannot help Santiago. The Sun suggests that Santiago ask the Hand that wrote all. Santiago then starts to pray – but that prayer emerges as not a request but an acknowledgement, as if culled from some deeper knowledge, that his heart and the Soul of the World are the same thing. Once Santiago comes to this realization, the wind begins to furiously blow and the tribesman find that Santiago has disappeared. He reappears on the other side of the camp. The tribal chiefs are so impressed that they let the travelers go and give them a guide so that they can reach their destination safely.

The next day, the alchemist and Santiago arrive at a coptic monastery. The alchemist uses his piece of the Philosopher's Stone to turn lead into a quantity of gold and gives some to Santiago and some to a monk. (He also gives an extra piece for the monk to hold onto for Santiago in case something should happen.) The alchemist takes his leave of Santiago, who travels farther and finally comes to the Pyramids. There he is overwhelmed with joy; he realizes all at once that he can turn back now, that the real treasure is not gold or jewels but the wisdom he has gained and his love for Fatima.

The alchemist told him, however, to listen to his heart. His heart tells him to start digging in the spot where he sees a scarab beetle. As he starts digging, a group of men approach him and beat him savagely, taking all of his money. When Santiago tries to explain what he is doing, one of the men tells him that he is a fool. He goes on to explain to Santiago that he had a recurring dream, too, depicting the same situation – but in Spain instead. He, however, was not stupid enough to go chasing after it, he remarks. After the robbers leave, Santiago gets up, elated. He now knows where his treasure lies.

Analysis

Traveling with the alchemist, Santiago learns many things that were merely hinted when he was traveling alone. It is with the alchemist that he finally realizes that his heart and soul are just little pieces of the Soul of the World. This is in keeping with the pantheism stressed throughout the whole of the book: God is one big soul, the Soul of the World. Because of this, all religions that recognize this fact are one and the same. This is the reasoning behind the ecumenicist thematic of the novel.

This section also contains the climax of the narrative, wherein the magical undercurrent of the novel comes to the fore. In this climax, Santiago talks to the elements: the Desert, the Wind, the Sun and finally the Soul of the World. A few aspects of this scene should be highlighted. First of all, we see that Santiago's communication with these inanimate forces is the realization of the alchemist's assertion that all things, even rocks and

animals, have souls. What this essentially does is deny the dualism that we normally assume in our day to day lives: there is no real difference between things and beings. We are all beings with souls, some of whose characteristics are different than others.

Second, it is important to note that while Santiago talks to the Wind, the Desert and the Sun using words, when it comes time to communicate with the Soul of the World he cannot speak. This not to say, however, that he cannot communicate; what it means is that words are not sufficient. Communicating with the Soul of the Word ends up being a matter of opening his heart. This portrayal of language as lacking or insufficient is coherent with other parts of the novel wherein humanity is described as essentially fallen. The problem is not that the secrets of life are complicated, but that mankind has complicated these secrets through the use of language. The final step of Santiago's spiritual journey is therefore not accomplished through speaking, but through listening.

The twist at the story's end – that the treasure was always near Santiago after all – reinforces the teachings of the alchemist. Just as the alchemist insists that the secrets he holds are in fact simple and easy to understand, so too was the treasure always at home. Thus, the secrets to living a happier, more fulfilled life are not far away or exotic: they are quite often right in front of us, right under our noses. The rub is that often we must travel far and wide in order to realize this.

Summary and Analysis of Epilogue

Summary

Santiago arrives at the abandoned church as night falls and looks at the stars. He remembers when he and the alchemist looked at the stars while traveling in the desert and thinks about how far he has come both physically and spiritually. The next morning he begins digging, and within half an hour his shovel hits something hard. Within the next hour he has unearthed a huge chest full of gold and jewels. He remembers that he must go back to Tarifa to give the gypsy her share. When he is ready to leave he smells the wind blowing off the desert – bringing with it the kisses of Fatima.

Analysis

It is at this point in the narrative that the two parallel quests of Santiago come together. The fact that the physical treasure that Santiago sought was always close to home drives home the message that a spiritual journey is not about becoming someone else, but rather about finding oneself.

At the end of the narrative, Santiago returns to Fatima. This confirms what the Alchemist said about love: Santiago is able in the end to achieve both his Personal Legend and find his true love.

Themes:

Dreams (Sleeping)

It is a dream that first leads Santiago to pursue his destiny. It is also a dream (although someone else's dream) that sends him back.

Santiago dreams of a child showing him a treasure at the base of the Pyramids; when we first read of the dream, we are led to believe that Santiago has had it before. When he tells the gypsy of Tarifa and Melchizedek about this dream, they both implore him to follow it, because, they argue, dreams are the language in which the Universe speaks. At the end of the book, it is the dream of the robber—which was the exact inverse of Santiago's dream, showing the treasure at the abandoned church—that sends Santiago back to Spain and to the treasure. The theme of dreams is linked, then, with the theme of fate, since dreams are the way in which people come to know their destiny.

Love

When the story of *The Alchemist* begins, the reader finds Santiago looking forward to a rendezvous with a merchant's daughter he met the previous year. As soon as he is convinced to go in search of his treasure, however, Santiago forgets all about the girl. Then he meets Fatima at the Al-Fayoum oasis, and thinks about giving up his quest to be with her. The difference between the two cases is two-fold.

First, what Santiago felt for the merchant girl was not love. It was merely an attraction that had no spiritual element to it. For this reason it was very easy for Santiago to shrug her off and continue with his fate. In the case of Fatima, though, everything is different. The first time that Santiago and Fatima see one another, Santiago feels that the Soul of the World is speaking directly to him. Secondly, Fatima does not encourage Santiago to abandon his Personal Legend. It is for this reason that Fatima's love does not prevent him from pursuing his fate. Since Fatima is part of Santiago's fate, she does not stand in the way of his Personal Legend. This is the fundamental difference between true love and all other love and one of the main themes of *The Alchemist* – namely, that true love never gets in the way of living one's life to the fullest. If one has to choose between a Personal Legend and love then that love is not true love after all.

Fate

One of the fundamental themes of *The Alchemist* is that our paths are pre-ordained or maktub, in the words of the shopkeeper. The goal of life is to live in harmony with what is

ordained for one, or one's Personal Legend; happiness depends upon this harmony. Ostensibly, we all once knew, as children, what our Personal Legends were. The main problem is that as humans and adults, we strive to make things more complex than they really are. In the text of *The Alchemist*, this problem is mirrored by the experience Santiago has with alchemy. While traveling through the desert with the Englishman, Santiago reads several books about the secrets of alchemy. The books claim that the original secret of alchemy could be written in a single sentence, but that mankind had made its explanations of that secret so convoluted that they could not be understood by anyone. Santiago rejects this and contends that he can learn everything he needs to know about alchemy through his day-to-day life. This conviction, that one's fate, or Personal Legend, is apparent in any aspect of one's normal life forms one of the most important themes of *The Alchemist*. When Melchizedek says, "When you want something, all the universe is conspiring to help you achieve it," (22) he means that since it is fate that puts a desire in Santiago's heart, fate won't stop him from achieving it. The problem is focusing one's energy on determining what it is that one really wants. Santiago does this during the last leg of his journey with the Alchemist, when he learns from the desert to look inside himself and silence his petty fears. By silencing these fears, he is able to finally see that he is one with the world around him and that his Personal Legend is a harmonious part of that world. This is evinced in a magical fashion when Santiago is able to communicate with the elements, in the climactic scene in which he turns himself into the wind.

Unity

The unity of all existence can be traced as a theme through two main aspects of the narrative. First, as Coelho describes it, the Soul of the World unites us all – people, plants, rocks and elements. Second, that there is no significant difference between the different religions of the world. In the narrative of *The Alchemist*, this unity of humans and the natural world is pointed out several times. One example is the Alchemist's assertion that even material elements have a Personal Legend. The reason that alchemists can turn any metal into gold is because it is the Personal Legend of that common metal to become gold. Alchemists help elements achieve their Personal Legends in much the same way as the Alchemist helps Santiago realize his own Legend. This unity with the natural world can also be seen when Santiago converses with the wind, the desert and, finally, the one hand which wrote everything. This, the reader is to understand, is God.

In a sense, the final realization of the book is that Santiago's soul is just a part of the Soul of the World, which is the same as God. This in turn translates in to a much more pragmatic ecumenicist theme in the book – that is to say, that throughout the narrative there is a minimization of the difference between Muslim and Christian, the two religious spheres in which the narrative takes place. The reader is led to understand that

since God is one with all of creation, all religions are essentially saying the same thing. Thus, Santiago's initial thoughts about the strangeness of the "infidels," as he first refers to the residents of the city of Tangiers, are quite quickly swept away by his realization that the spiritual concerns of Muslims are very similar to his own. The shopkeeper's concerns about his dream of pilgrimage to Mecca can be identified with any dream that one is afraid of fulfilling.

Selfishness

The book opens with a prologue which retells the story of Narcissus, bringing the question of selfishness to the fore. In the traditional telling of the story of Narcissus, Narcissus drowns in a lake because he is so enamored with his own reflection that he falls in. In the prologue's unique retelling, it is revealed that while Narcissus was selfish, the lake in which Narcissus drowned was also selfish. After Narcissus' death, the lake misses him because it could contemplate itself in his eyes. This already tells the reader that the theme of selfishness will not be treated in a one-sided, moralizing manner.

Selfishness reappears in the form of the Personal Legend. The Personal Legend is something which a person truly desires with all of his/her heart. The novel suggests that the only thing that is important in life is to pursue this dream at whatever cost. Often this means avoiding things which are not conducive to achieving this dream. In the case of Santiago, this means leaving his familial home. It also means that any love which he experiences must not get in the way of his Personal Legend.

The novel states that, since the Personal Legend is placed in one's heart by Fate or the Soul of the World, pursuing the Personal Legend is not an option; it is instead one's duty. The Alchemist thus suggests that selfishness is not necessarily evil, but is to a degree the only way to live at peace with the universe and to be happy.

Dreams (Aspirations)

Dreams in the sense of "goals" or "aspirations" also constitute a major theme. Santiago's dream of the treasure provides him with a goal; Santiago resolves to find the treasure, and by his decision to pursue this goal he is able to realize his Personal Legend. Thus, Coelho plays with the dual (and of course linked) meanings of the word "dream", as both visions during slumber and far-reaching objectives. In this sense, the message of The Alchemist could be described as follows: everyone needs a dream. The vulnerable periods of Santiago's journey are when he has no clearly defined goal. This is true when he finishes working at the crystal shop, as well as when he contemplates

staying at the oasis with Fatima. Both times he thinks about desisting, but winds up carrying on unswayed.

As a counterpoint, we can think of the shopkeeper, who is afraid to realize his dream of going to Mecca. He does not want to achieve his dream because he feels that it is the only thing keeping him looking forward to the future. Santiago tries to show him that if it is his destiny, he has no choice but to seek it out, or else he is not living. In this way, *The Alchemist* is not about what one should dream, but merely that one should dream.