**Summary**

[The Alchemist](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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.

## Summary

The story opens with the main character, the shepherd [Santiago](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#santiago), arriving at an abandoned church with a sycamore (клен) growing in it in the Spanish region of Andalusia. He decides to stay the night at the church and corrals (загонять) his herd стадо 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 (вспоминать) 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.

Once [Santiago](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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 Urimm 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.

## Summary

After working at the crystal shop for a month, [Santiago](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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 (повторять) 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](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#melchizedek) getting robbed and happening upon the shopkeeper and the crystal shop - where 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 Word 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](https://www.gradesaver.com/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.

## 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 (подн настроение, подбодпять) 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](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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 (условие): if the enemy arrives, the chief will give Santiago a piece of gold for every 10 enemies slain (убивать) ; 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 (нападать) by a man with a falcon (сокол) 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.

## Summary

After reaffirming his love to [Fatima](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#fatima), [Santiago](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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 with 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 (изменчивый) , that it does not want him to continue. "Treason (измена, предательство) 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 tribesman 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.

## Summary

[Santiago](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#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](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-alchemist-coelho/study-guide/character-list#fatima).