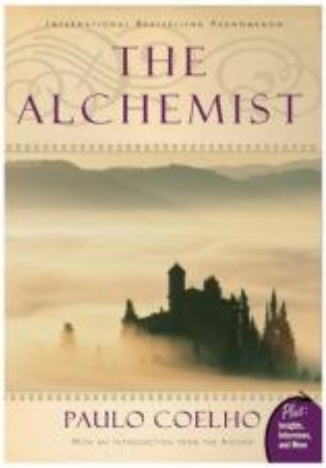
# The Alchemist

by Paulo Coelho




## About the Book

Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy, has a dream about finding a treasure in the pyramids of Egypt. A gypsy woman and an old man claiming to be a mysterious king advise him to pursue it. "To realize one's destiny is a person's only obligation," the old man tells him. "And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."

With the courage of an adventurer, Santiago sells his sheep and travels to Tangiers in Africa. After a thief steals his money, Santiago takes a job with a crystal merchant who unwittingly teaches Santiago important lessons for his long journey ahead. After working at the crystal shop for a year, Santiago earns enough money to cover his losses and return home. But then something unexpected happens. On a desert caravan, Santiago meets an intriguing Englishman. The Englishman's passion for knowledge and his relentless quest to uncover the secrets of alchemy inspire Santiago to pursue his own dream of finding the treasure. As the Englishman searches for the two hundred year old alchemist who resides in the desert oasis, Santiago falls in love with a young woman, Fatima. Exposed to the greatest and eternal alchemy of all?love?Santiago thinks he has found the treasure. But the greatest test of all is yet to come. With the help of the alchemist, Santiago completes the last leg of his journey?dangerous and infused with discoveries of the most profound kind?to find that the treasure he was looking for was waiting for him in the place where he least expected.

This story, timeless and entertaining, exotic yet simple, breaks down the journey we all take to find the most meaningful treasures in our lives into steps that are at once natural and magical. It is about the faith, power, and courage we all have within us to pursue the intricate path of a Personal Legend, a path charted by the mysterious magnet of destiny but obscured by distractions. Santiago shows how along the way we learn to trust our hearts, read the seemingly inconspicuous signs, and understand that as we look to fulfill a dream, it looks to find us just the same, if we let it.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** At the start of his journey, when Santiago asks a gypsy woman to interpret his dream about a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids, she asks for one tenth of the treasure in return. When Santiago asks the old man to show him the path to the treasure, the old man requests one tenth of his flock as "payment." Both payments represent a different price we have to pay to fulfill a dream; however, only one will yield a true result. Which payment represents false hope? Can you think of examples from your own life when you had to give up something to meet a goal and found the price too high?

**2.** Paulo Coelho once said that alchemy is all about pursuing our spiritual quest in the physical world as it was given to us. It is the art of transmuting the reality into something sacred, of mixing the sacred and the profane. With this in mind, can you define your Personal Legend? At what time in your life were you first able to act on it? What was your "beginner's luck"? Did anything prevent you from following it to conclusion? Having read **The Alchemist**, do you know what inner resources you need to continue the journey?

**3.** One of the first major diversions from Santiago's journey was the theft of his money in Tangiers, which forced him into taking a menial job with the crystal merchant. There, Santiago learned many lessons on everything from the art of business to the art of patience. Of all these, which lessons were the most crucial to the pursuit of his Personal Legend?

**4.** When he talked about the pilgrimage to Mecca, the crystal merchant argued that having a dream is more important than fulfilling it, which is what Santiago was trying to do. Do you agree with Santiago's rationale or crystal merchant's?

**5.** The Englishman, whom Santiago meets when he joins the caravan to the Egyptian pyramids, is searching for "a universal language, understood by everybody." What is that language? According to the Englishman, what are the parallels between reading and alchemy? How does the Englishman's search for the alchemist compares to Santiago's search for a treasure? How did the Englishman and Santiago feel about each other?

**6.** The alchemist tells Santiago "you don't have to understand the desert: all you have to do is contemplate a simple grain of sand, and you will see in it all the marvels of creation." With this in mind, why do you think the alchemist chose to befriend Santiago, though he knew that the Englishman was the one looking for him? What is the meaning of two dead hawks and the falcon in the oasis? At one point the alchemist explains to Santiago the secret of successfully turning metal into gold. How does this process compare to finding a Personal Legend?

**7.** Why did Santiago have to go through the dangers of tribal wars on the outskirts of the oasis in order to reach the pyramids? At the very end of the journey, why did the alchemist leave Santiago alone to complete it?

**8.** Earlier in the story, the alchemist told Santiago "when you possess great treasures within you, and try to tell others of them, seldom are you believed." At the end of the story, how did this simple lesson save Santiago's life? How did it lead him back to the treasure he was looking for?

## Author Bio

Paulo Coelho is the author of many international bestsellers, including THE ALCHEMIST, ELEVEN MINUTES, THE PILGRIMAGE and THE FIFTH MOUNTAIN. He has been a member of the Academy of Letters of Brazil since 2002 and in 2007 was named a Messenger of Peace by the United Nations. In 2009, he received the Guinness World Record for Most Translated Author for the Same Book (THE ALCHEMIST). He lives in Geneva, Switzerland.

Paulo Coelho?s books have been translated into 82 languages and have sold more than 230 million copies in more than 170 countries. His 1988 novel, THE ALCHEMIST, has sold more than 85 million copies and has been cited as an inspiration by people as diverse as Malala Yousafzai and Pharrell Williams.

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