Santiago’s Life Lessons in Tangier

Santiago ends up in Tangier after the king who told him about his Personal Legend told him where he needed to go. There, he spent a long time and learned many important things. The most important lesson that Santiago learns in Tangier is that “there are certain things that one shouldn’t ask about” (43). He realizes that if he asks too many questions, he might scare himself out of fulfilling his Personal Legend. This is the most crucial lesson that Santiago learns because it causes him to trust in love at first sight, believe his visions, not to doubt his mentors, and to trust his instincts.

At the well in the oasis, when Santiago saw Fatima for the first time, he didn’t wonder if he was actually in love with her or if she was the right person for him (or vice versa). He just fell in love. Most people would be worried that they would no longer be in love with someone in the future since they had just met, and that they wouldn’t do well together. With his knowledge that one shouldn’t ask questions, Santiago had no trouble saying “I want you to be my wife. I love you. I’m going to wait here for you every day” (96-97). He also prevented any falling out from happening and instead found his “soul mate” quickly and by the grace of the omens that he learned to listen to.

When Santiago has a vision that the oasis that his caravan is stopped in is about to be attacked, he barely questions whether or not it is real. He immediately consults the tribal leaders about his vision, and they decide to trust him. Subsequently, the enemy comes to the oasis and proves him correct: “The men of the oasis surrounded the horsemen from the desert and within half an hour all but one of the intruders were dead” (58). If he hadn’t realized that he shouldn’t ask too many questions and to just believe certain things, the caravan and the entire population of the oasis likely would have been decimated, and with it any chance of him fulfilling his Personal Legend.

When the Alchemist proposes to Santiago that the two of them journey towards the pyramids from the oasis, would have refused to travel with someone whom they barely knew. Santiago, knowing that some questions shouldn’t be asked, went anyway: “[Santiago and the Alchemist] mounted their horses, and rode out in the direction of the Pyramids of Egypt” (72). If he had questioned the Alchemist, he never would have made anywhere near the pyramids or found his treasure, and he would have regretted it for the rest of his life. The lesson he learned in Tangier was incredibly important in this situation.

Near the pyramids when Santiago is digging in the sand, trying to find the treasure, a group of men come upon him. They steal his gold and ask him what he’s digging for, and he tells them that he is digging for treasure because he had a dream telling him to search there. One of the men says that he had a recurring dream where there was treasure beneath the roots of a sacristy in Spain, but he isn’t stupid enough to cross an entire desert just because of a dream. When the man says this, Santiago realizes where his treasure is: it is where his story started, back where he kept his sheep. Most people, after the experience Santiago had of not finding his treasure, would have been cynical and not gone back. Santiago was not most people. Knowing that he shouldn’t doubt surprising things or even question them, he went back to Spain and found his treasure. He knew to trust omens, as the old king had taught him: “’Never stop dreaming,’ the old king had said. ‘Follow the omens.’ (31) . If he had doubted the omen that the man’s dream provided for him, he never would have found his treasure.

Santiago may not have used them a lot, but Thummim and Urim taught him something extremely important when they fell through his knapsack when he asked something too crucial to his Personal Legend. Throughout the story, there are situations in which Santiago would have been much worse off if he had asked questions and doubted the correctness of his instincts and heart. Without this lesson, Santiago would have likely never fulfilled his Personal Legend. His relationship with Fatima, his vision of the oasis being attacked would have gone unnoticed and unfulfilled if he had doubted the omens and feelings of his heart and followed his brain instead. Also, the same would have happened with his trust of the unknown Alchemist, and the omen of the tribal war refugee’s dream. Not questioning the unknown was crucial to Santiago’s success.