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A Shepherd versus a King

Travelling in the vast desert of Sahara, one would naturally feel as vulnerable as lonely sailors on the sea. Indeed, when introduced to Santiago the shepherd, who embarked on a quest across the desert in pursuit of his treasure in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, we could relate him with Odysseus, the protagonist in Homer's *The Odyssey*, whose voyage home involved almost endless years on the sea. In spite of similarities between their adventures, there is a drastic difference between their personalities.

Granted, both Odysseus and Santiago demonstrated an incredible amount of courage and perseverance with which they overcame various obstacles and claimed reward at the end of the day. Nonetheless, differences can be spotted in the way they tackle those hindrances. On his way of reaching the Soul of the World, Santiago learned to observe and interpret omens, and converse with nature through his own heart. With this approach he gained information and practiced miracles. On the contrary, Odysseus lived in a world of polytheism, instead of pantheism, where the mortals worshipped deities on the heights of Mount Olympus, whose wills were expressed through omens and oracles. With the assistance of his godly patron Athena, Odysseus survived the wrath of an angry Poseidon and all the other terrors filling the ocean. Apart from that, he also exhibited adeptness in utilizing schemes and plots through the sack of Troy, his escape from the Cyclops and the way he earned the trust and help of Phaeacians.

In conclusion, the knowledge and ingenuity of Odysseus and the enthusiasm and faith of Santiago stand in stark contrast, providing two angles towards heroic journeys.