

The Alchemist Summary – Paulo Coelho

10 MINUTE READ

by [Paulo Coelho](#)

The Alchemist is a spiritual seeker's go-to novel for inspiring you to follow your dreams. Develop your character with the alchemy of spirit and the signs of the omens. No matter how far you travel, your personal legend waits within – by visionary author, Paulo Coelho. ([197 pages](#))

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Note: This **The Alchemist summary** is part of an ongoing project to summarise the [Best Mindset Books](#) and [Best Fiction Books](#) of all time.

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The Alchemist Review

Paulo Coelho's novel, *The Alchemist*, stands out to me as a writer and spiritualist. Coelho writes clearly and insightfully, combining a simple storyline with the passion of a true seeker. These facts are as true for *The Alchemist* as any of Coelho's other books. But *The Alchemist*'s masterful use of symbolism makes it special.

Coelho's own life was strange and full of burdens. He was sent to an insane asylum by his parents when he was only 17. He also spent years in and out of prison. Those harrowing experiences likely helped to develop the imagination behind this book.

As a reader, you're taken around the world. You visit a simple countryside in Spain. You venture to the Al-Fayoum oasis in an Egyptian desert. You meander through a busy merchant stall in Tangier. You ride on the backs of beasts in a camel caravan to seek treasure and alchemy.

Finally, you're inspired to seek your dreams. You're encouraged not to give your dreams up, no matter what strange territory you cross internally. You're urged follow your dreams no matter what.

The Alchemist reveals the secret of the world's wordless language. We are all one, and need not speak one language to communicate.

Coelho's simple yet powerful lessons reveal the alchemy of personality through a story of courage, perseverance and a little help from "the omens."

The Alchemist Summary

Santiago: A Shepherd in Andalusia

The Alchemist is set in Andalusia (Southern Spain). The main character is a shepherd named Santiago. Santiago comes from a family of little means and was drawn to shepherding as a young boy as a way to travel.

One day his father, who secretly wishes he had travelled the world, gives Santiago some ancient, gold coins that he found in a field. This way Santiago can buy his own flock of sheep now, instead of after his father's death.

The gold coins given to Santiago by his father represent the evolution of Santiago's soul. They also represent the collective joy he adds to the soul of the world by following his dream.

The sheep represent the oneness we have with all things as well as people who don't seek their soul's imperative or personal passion. They are content to eat grass and have someone guide them from field to field.

Santiago wants more. He has a recurring dream that spurs his adventure. He dreams of a small child telling him of a treasure among the Egyptian pyramids. Thus the treasure in his quest to see the world is both literal and figurative.

The Andalusian shepherd boy has many lessons to learn about spiritual alchemy. He finds his life purpose, or what Coelho calls our "own personal legend" with the help of some interesting characters.

A raven-haired girl, and merchant's daughter, that lives in a nearby village inspires Santiago to better himself. Yet, the promise of finding a treasure in Egypt lures Santiago. He is inspired to find a ticket seller to go to Africa and the smells of the desert.

The Principle of Favorability

Santiago learns that when you play cards the first time you're almost sure to win. It's a beginner's luck. The Universe whets your appetite with the taste of success.

He meets an old man who calls himself the "King of Salem", otherwise known as Melchizedek in a plaza. The old man convinces him to sell 1/10 of his sheep (6 sheep) to him in return for advice on finding his treasure in among the pyramids.

To find the treasure, he is told to read the omens that are left by God. A butterfly appears, telling Santiago to listen to the old man's advice.

Melchizedek's breastplate is heavy with fine jewels and stones. He gives Santiago black and white stones, urim and thummim, each signifying yes or no, so he can determine what to do when he can't read the omens. But, Santiago is advised to trust his own judgement whenever possible.

Santiago never meets Melchizedek again, but his counsel follows him everywhere he goes.

Santiago looks out over Tarifa, a fort built by the Moors, and takes the next steps in his journey.

Santiago Follows the Omens

A man appears who suggests that Santiago must cross the Sahara desert. Tangier is not like Africa, suggests his new friend. He suggests they should buy two camels.

While Santiago is distracted, looking at a sword encrusted with stones at the market, his new "friend" steals all his money. This leaves him with only the two stones, urim and thummim. He wonders whether he should return to his homeland, now with no sheep and no money, but he decides to

forge ahead.

By observing a candy merchant, Santiago learns that you can sense if a person is near or far from their personal legend. All you have to do is look at them.

Santiago Goes to Work for a Crystal Merchant

Santiago stumbles across a crystal glassware maker. He watches the infrequent comings and goings of his customers. He offers to clean the glassware in exchange for something to eat. The crystal merchant takes him to a cafe nearby for lunch. "You don't have to do any cleaning, the Koran requires me to feed a hungry person," says the shopkeeper.

Cleaning crystal is a metaphor for cleaning the mind.

Two customers buy crystal while Santiago is cleaning, and the shopkeeper notes this as a good omen. He offers Santiago a job working in his crystal shop. Santiago asks for money to go to Egypt the next day if he works all night. But he ends up working for the crystal merchant and helping his shop to thrive for almost a year.

Santiago learns that having a dream keeps you from dreading day-to-day activities and the mundane nature of life.

Santiago builds a display for the shopkeeper's crystal, bringing many more customers. They also begin selling tea in the crystal to quench the thirst of people who reach the top of the mountain where the crystal shop is located. They have to hire two more employees because the crystal becomes so popular and the owner purchases many more crystals to sell.

Santiago decides to stop working at the shop so that he can buy his sheep and return home. His dream of traveling to find treasure among the pyramids is now distant.

Yet, Santiago is bid farewell by the shopkeeper, who knows he won't go home to Spain. He will continue his personal legend, and find his treasure in Egypt.

It is the two stones that fall to the floor when Santiago is leaving that urge him forward. He decides he can conquer the world just as easily as Tangier. The hills of Andalusia are only two hours away, but he decides to find a way to get to the desert and his pyramids.

Santiago Meets the Englishman and the Camel Caravan

Santiago then meets an Englishman in a warehouse. The Englishman is obsessed with finding the philosopher's stone and an elixir of life. He is a student of alchemy.

The Englishman knows of an old man. He has all the secrets to creating the elixir of life. This elixir is a liquid that helps someone live forever. The metals used in the same concoction are able to create gold with just a sliver.

At first, Santiago is uninterested in the Englishman's obsession with alchemy. But this is a foreshadowing of future events. Santiago will become the student of the wise alchemist after proving himself worthy.

Santiago Falls in Love with Fatima

Along his journey, the shepherd has more adventures. He falls in love with an Arab maiden named Fatima. This reminds us that we can experience love and romance on our personal journey.

Fatima appears once Santiago and the Englishman part ways. He tells her he loves her and that he wants to stay with her after visiting her at a well every day in Al-Fayoum. The well symbolizes endless, unconditional love. Santiago shares his personal legend with Fatima. Sadly, he must part from

her to travel to the pyramids. He promises to return.

Santiago Bonds with the Camel Driver

While traveling to Egypt, Santiago bonds with the camel driver leading the expedition. He is a pleasant distraction on the long journey.

Santiago and the Englishman have several differences in opinion. Santiago likes to observe the endless expanse of the desert and to remain quiet, observing the power of the elements like the wind and sand. The Englishman is forever talking about alchemy.

The camel driver listens raptly to Santiago's story of seeking treasure. The camel driver also keeps Santiago safe as they travel through Bedouin lands.

Santiago Meets the Alchemist

There are more symbols when Santiago meets the alchemist for the first time. He awaits the alchemist's arrival by his tent and the alchemist arrives at midnight on a white horse, with two dead hawks on his shoulders.

Santiago is signaled to enter the tent by the alchemist, but only after he is assured that his personal legend instructs him to do so. This section of the book teaches us that we must follow our destiny. The only alchemy that we can access is that of our personal legends.

The alchemist eventually teaches Santiago how to connect with the Soul of the World. He uses supernatural skills like a shaman or yogic priest. The alchemist may even give him a form of "diksha," or spiritual insight. This allows him to finish his personal legend and find his treasure.

Santiago Finds His Treasure

Santiago does indeed find his treasure. This treasure is in his experiences. It includes meeting Melchizedek's and working at the crystal shop. It includes the Englishman, Fatima, and the wise, old, alchemist that leads him to his treasure.

In this moment of epiphany, Santiago realises that his material treasure is back in his homeland. It was waiting for him to achieve his personal alchemy.

When Santiago finds his treasure, it is under a sycamore tree in Andalusia, Spain, near the church where he dreamed of it as a young boy. Though he travels all the way to Egypt to find his treasure, it is the journey that reveals the treasure to him.

At first, it may seem a cruel twist for Coelho to send Santiago all over the world looking for a treasure that was in his backyard all along.

But his treasure is not just a material one that he finds under the sycamore tree. It is also the rich gift he finds in his relationships with others. It is in learning true alchemy, and in traveling to different places and honing his own skills.

His greatest treasure is learning along the way as he pursues his personal legend. The lesson is that there are many treasures to be had when we follow our dreams. Sometimes we may even get more than we bargained for.

Thematic Ideas in The Alchemist

There are many themes in the Alchemist, all of which are spiritual fodder for those who love Coelho's work. Themes help to bring symbols and words into a cohesive whole so that the lessons of a book sink in more deeply. These include...

The importance of pursuing your personal dreams and goals, or what Coelho calls "your personal legend." When you get closer to your personal legend, you experience synergistic support from the Universe. That helps to push you toward circumstances and people who can help you achieve your heart's desire.

The importance of fate or destiny. This is referred to as Maktub by the crystal merchant. It is an Arabic phrase meaning, "it is written." When we follow our personal legend, we are guided by fate or destiny as much as our own free will. Free will allows us to make the decision and take action. This puts us in a stream of great force, which guides us toward our destiny.

The oneness and interconnectedness of all things. Santiago first notices this when he is tending his sheep. He notices that he can communicate with them even though they don't speak as humans do. He later notices that people speaking different languages can understand one another with ease. This is symbolic of our connection to a greater intelligence. Some call this oneness God, but Coelho never uses the term. He simply infers a greater intelligence that connects us all.

The practice of alchemy, and the full-circle experiences we get to have when we follow simple omens and make use of spiritual insight. Coelho's book is simple. It uses symbols and written alchemy to explain its deep insights. This is true of life as well. If we follow the symbols, we can learn what steps we must take next on our own personal journeys. Life's troubles may always beckon, but the omens will guide us to the next best step.

The inevitability of death and fear, and how unimportant both are when we are following our dreams. Coelho uses danger and fear as common themes to explore the ego. We learn how we can eradicate fear. This allows us to attain connection with oneness and experience our own spiritual transformations. The ills of the ego are outlined in several

instances. For instance:

When Santiago is robbed by a seeming new friend.

When he must work for the crystal shopkeeper even though he wants to travel to Egypt right away.

When he butts heads with the Englishman over his world view.

Each time Santiago overcomes his doubts, his ego is made smaller. He is able to positively affect others so that they may obtain their personal legend as well.

The Alchemist FAQs

What Is The Alchemist About (Short Summary)?

The Alchemist is about identifying your own personal purpose, following that dream, and not being deterred. Santiago, the main character, teaches us to venture as far across the world as we must. The world will always have its own opinions of you and what you ought to do. But we have to build the courage within ourselves to do what is right with our own internal compass. The book outlines detrimental attitudes that keep you from achieving your dream. It advises you to follow the omens that appear, take help from wise strangers, and never give up. Following your dream is perhaps the most important thing you can do in your life. All joy and wisdom come from this endeavor.

What Is the Main Message of The Alchemist?

The main message of The Alchemist is to follow your dreams. It tells you not to be a sheep, complacent and mewing in a field, awaiting a shepherd to tell you where to go, when to sleep, and when to eat. It advises you to venture into distant lands. You should stop at nothing. Don't quit if

someone robs you, you lose your homeland, or even your faith. Don't stop when you find love. Don't stop when you meet odd characters, or you need to pause to make money to further your goal. Do what it takes to find your personal purpose. In the end, this is your greatest treasure.

Why Is The Alchemist So Popular?

The Alchemist is so popular because it uses common archetypal themes that we can all relate to. There are symbols that we all know, even on a subconscious level. Symbols speak to us as pictures do, relaying many ideas without words. These symbols remind us of the aspirations we have, but that we push aside, or make excuses not to follow through on. The book is written in simple language but is full of symbols and characters that are instantaneously relatable. From old kings to poor shepherds, shopkeepers, and scholars, we all have dreams to fulfill. It speaks to the Universal Soul within us all. When we are brave enough to follow our dreams, miracles happen.

Best The Alchemist Quotes

These The Alchemist quotes come from **The Art of Living's** ever-growing central library of thoughts, anecdotes, notes, and [inspirational quotes](#).

["When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."](#)

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

["It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting."](#)

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

["When we love, we always strive to become better than we are."](#)

"When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

"One is loved because one is loved. No reason is needed for loving."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

"There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

"The secret of life is to fall seven times and to get up eight times."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

"The simple things are also the most extraordinary things, and only the wise can see them."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

"I don't live in either my past or my future. I'm interested only in the present. If you can concentrate always on the present, you'll be a happy man. Life will be a party for you, a grand festival, because life is the moment we're living now."

- [Paulo Coelho](#), The Alchemist

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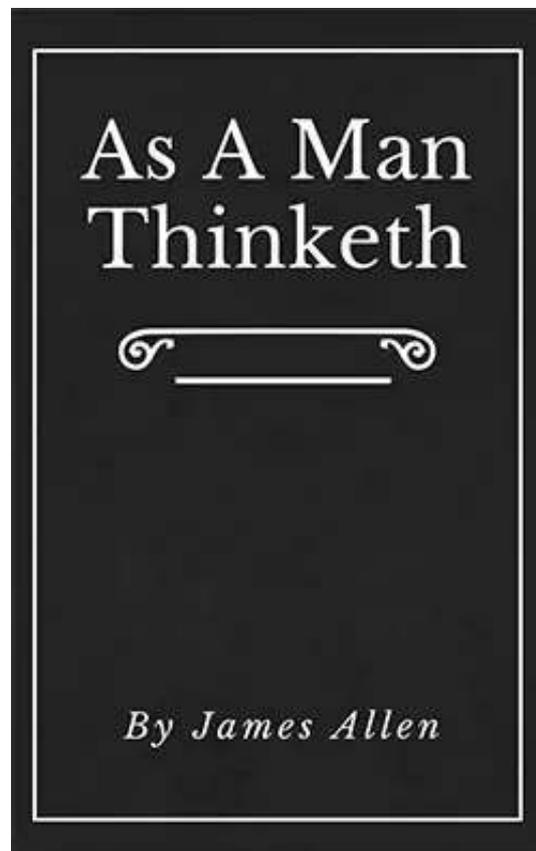
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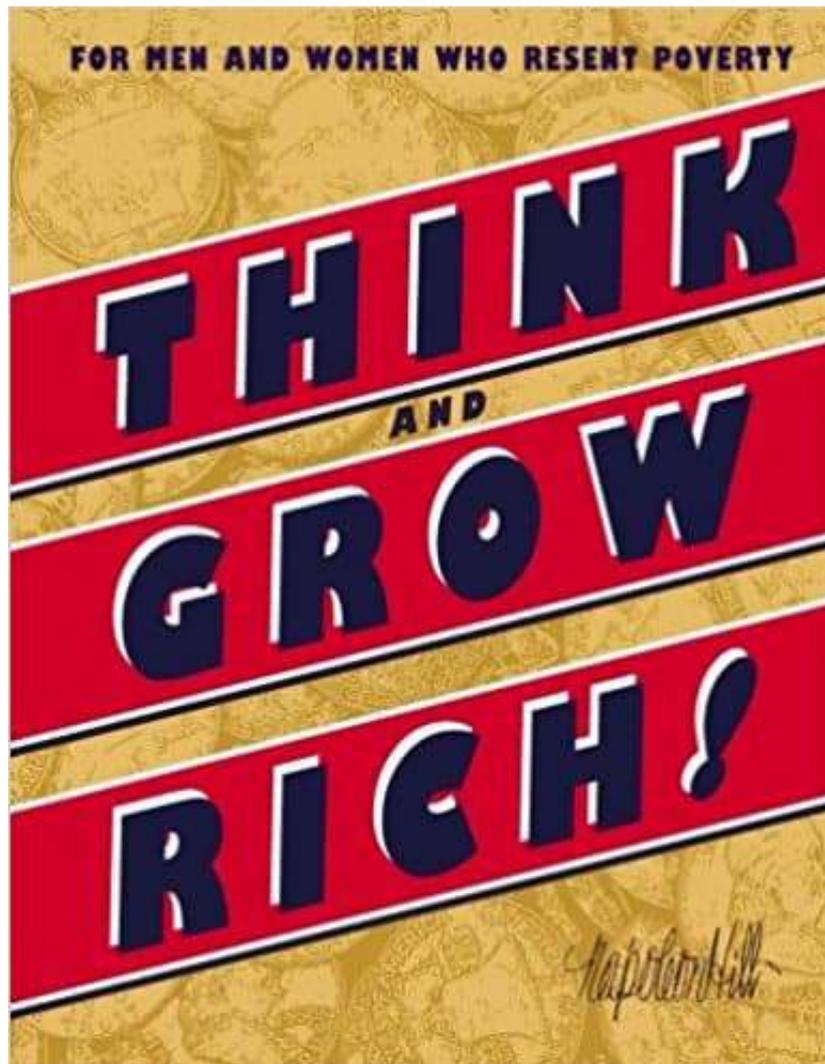
Here are 5 top books like The Alchemist...



1. [As a Man Thinketh](#) - [James Allen](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

As a Man Thinketh is THE #1 ranking, uplifting, pocket-sized pep-talk on the power and importance of changing your thoughts as the cornerstone to changing your life - by philosopher and prolific self-help author, James Allen.

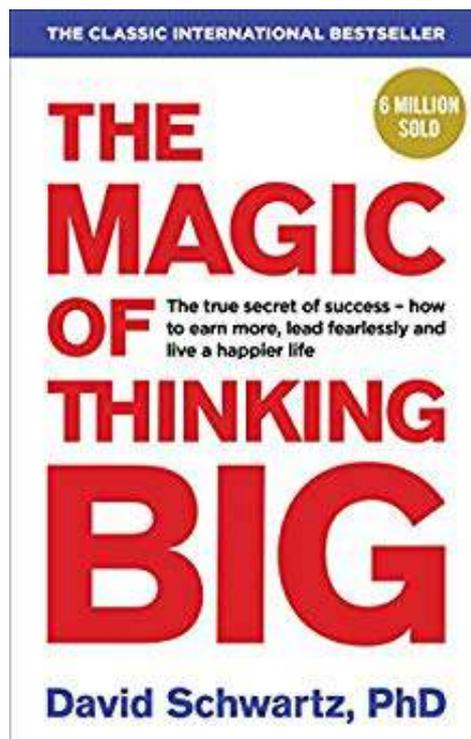
Published 1902 // 34 pages // Rated 4.3 over 68,100 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



2. [Think and Grow Rich](#) - [Napoleon Hill](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Think and Grow Rich is a best-selling book of all time and a cornerstone guide to the Law of Attraction and the role of the subconscious in transforming your life - by a titan of the self-help genre, Napoleon Hill.

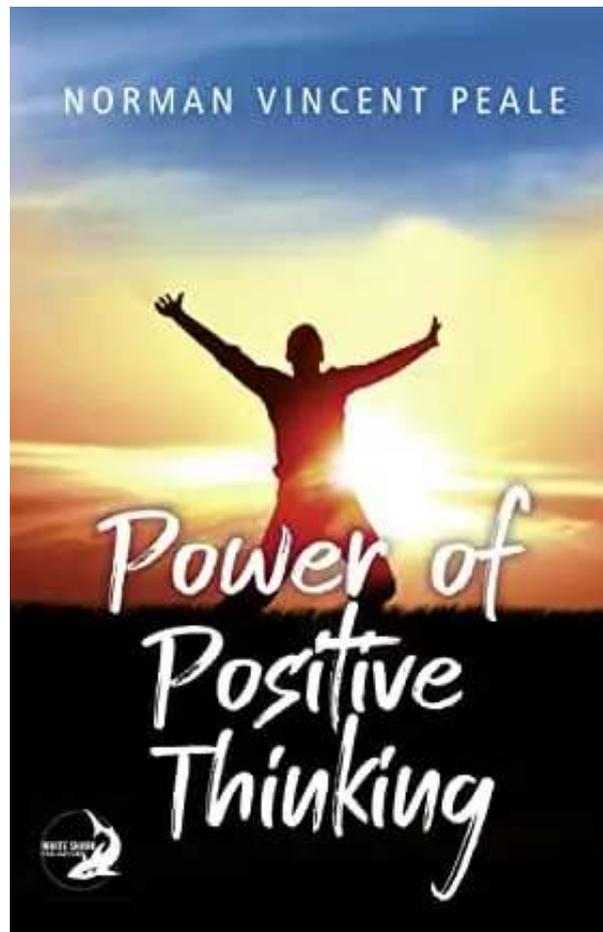
Published 1937 // 233 pages // Rated 4.2 over 254,900 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



3. [The Magic of Thinking Big](#) - [David J. Schwartz](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

The Magic of Thinking Big is a powerful, practical and uplifting book to help get you out of a rut, invigorate your goals and empower you towards success - by life-long motivational writer and coach, David J. Schwartz.

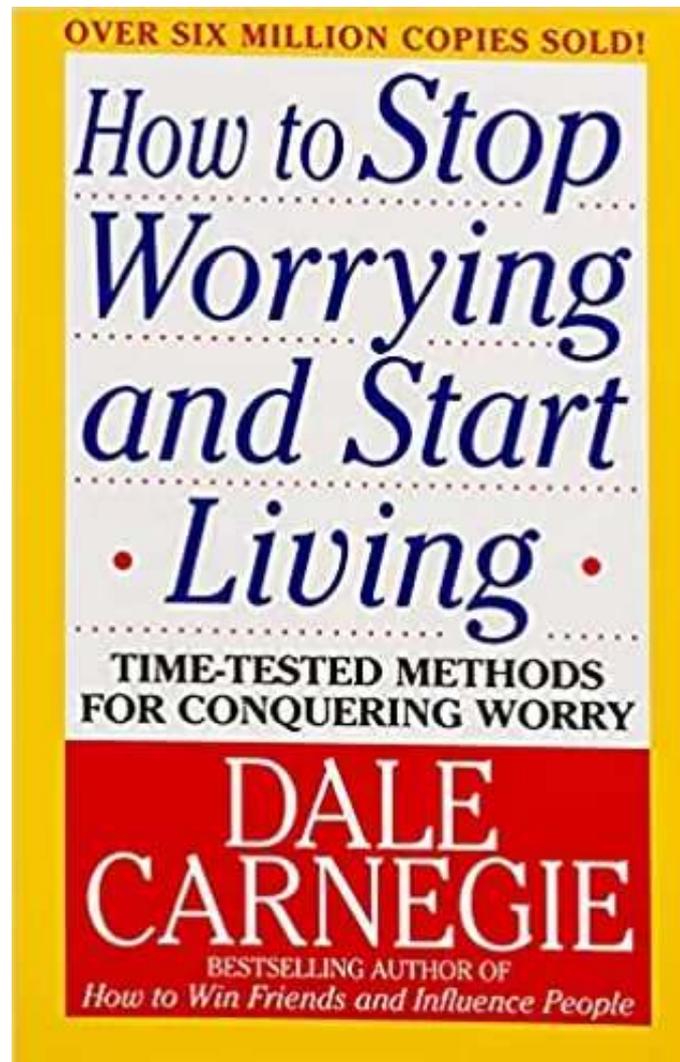
Published 1959 // 320 pages // Rated 4.2 over 77,300 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



4. [The Power of Positive Thinking](#) - [Norman Vincent Peale](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

The Power of Positive Thinking reminds us that we don't need a PhD in Human Relations to live our best lives if we can learn a few tricks to change how we think - by minister and best-selling author Norman Vincent Peale.

Published 1952 // 128 pages // Rated 4.1 over 96,300 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



5. [How to Stop Worrying and Start Living](#) - [Dale Carnegie](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

How to Stop Worrying and Start Living is a practical, common-sense bible filled with stories, case studies and simple step-by-step guides to conquering worry, anxiety and depression - by self development guru, Dale Carnegie.

Published 1944 // 358 pages // Rated 4.1 over 87,800 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

Wish There Was a Faster/Easier Way?

Whenever you're ready, here are four ways I can help you be more productive, find more balance and live life more on purpose...

1. **Curious? Discover how productive you really are...** Take this free, 2-minute assessment to unlock your PQ and discover the top 25 habits you need to get big things done. [Take the 2-minute quiz →](#)
2. **Overwhelmed? Get a free chapter of my book...** Let me show you how to beat procrastination, permanently, with this free sneak peek inside **TAoL**'s ultimate productivity primer. [Download your free chapter →](#)
3. **Stuck? Grab a 90-Day TRACKTION Planner...** Get the tool thousands trust to help them take control of their time, master their habits and hit goals in every part of their lives. [Order your 90-day planner →](#)
4. **Burned out? Join the TRACKTION Community...** Take the 6-week masterclass, get weekly group coaching, find accountability partners and connect with like-minded self-starters. [Get started FREE →](#)

[Christina Sarich](#)

Christina is a certified yoga instructor with over 15 years of teaching under her belt, trained in Nasik, India at Yoga Vidya Dham. She has been practicing meditation since the age of sixteen and has written thousands of articles on mindfulness, human development, altering consciousness, and alternative healing.