

# **THE BOOK OF NAMES**

**BY JILL GREGORY AND KAREN TINTORI**

## **READERS' STUDY GUIDE**

**Within each generation, there are thirty-six righteous souls. Their lives hold the key to the fate of the world. Now someone wants them dead.**

**When a childhood tragedy comes back to haunt Professor David Shepherd, he finds himself in possession of knowledge that holds the world in a delicate balance. He uncovers the Book of Names---an ancient text originating with the biblical Adam, and thought lost to history forever. By Kabbalistic tradition, the book contains the names of each generation's thirty-six righteous souls---the Hidden Ones---by whose merits alone the world continues to exist. Legend holds that if all thirty-six Hidden Ones were eliminated, the world would meet its end.**

**When the Hidden Ones start dying of unnatural causes, the world grows increasingly unstable: war in Afghanistan, massive flooding in New York, brutal terrorist attacks in Melbourne, a tanker explosion in Iran. David finds himself battling against the Gnoseos, a secret religious sect whose goal is to destroy the world by eliminating all of the righteous souls. David's involvement quickly turns personal when his stepdaughter's name is discovered to be one of the endangered. With the help of a brilliant and beautiful Israeli ancient texts expert, David races to decipher the traditions of the Kabbalah to save the righteous souls, his stepdaughter, and perhaps the world.**

Before reading **The BOOK OF NAMES**, had you ever heard of the Lamed Vovniks? If so, what did you know about them and how did reading the book affect your understanding of this Kabbalistic legend? If not, are you familiar with any other religious legends about hidden ones who walk among us?

When we first meet David Shepherd, he is a scientist and a secular Jew, who has had a bar mitzvah but isn't comfortable with "touchy-feely stuff." How does he change his views on Judaism and/or mysticism by the end of the book?

What did you find to be most intriguing about **THE BOOK OF NAMES?** -- the action scenes, the characters, the biblical history, the premise, or something else?

Have you ever visited Israel? The Vatican? Another holy site? Yael told David of the mystical and spiritual qualities of the city of Safed. If you have been to any such holy sites, did you experience a uniquely spiritual moment there? Where were you when it happened?

Have you ever experienced a profound or mystical moment in synagogue, church or mosque? Or in some non-religious setting? Describe the experience and its impact on your life.

Were you familiar with the twelve biblical gemstones and the magical powers of the breastplate of Aaron? What else do you know about them? King Arthur's sword was also a mystical object that represented a special power. Can you think of any other such objects in literature – either fictional or biblical -- which possess the power “to tip the balance?”

What are some qualities the Lamed Vovniks embody? Which of these qualities did Stacy possess and how did she demonstrate them in the story? Do you know any world figures or everyday people you would consider a Lamed Vovnik? Why?

The character Elizabeth had a pivotal effect on the outcome of **THE BOOK OF NAMES**. Why? How might things have played out differently if Eric Mueller had never met her?

Have you ever had a near-death experience or know anyone who has? What happened? What do you think about the stories people recount of going down the tunnel and seeing the light?

Yael tells David that mystics say the circles on the Tree of Life represent vessels that God filled with Divine light or energy to create the world. When he poured that strong light into the vessels they shattered into shards, which scattered to sprinkle that Divine light throughout the universe to form the world. She explains that each of the scattered shards was hidden “by a shell that concealed its light and that our task as human beings is to crack open those shells to bring God's light into the world again.” What are some ways that we can help bring God's light into the world?

What are some ways people can incorporate the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam* into their daily lives?

Has **THE BOOK OF NAMES** given you any insights into Jewish mysticism or Kabbalah? Has it made you want to learn more about those topics?

Although this story centers on Jewish characters and Jewish beliefs, how does the novel integrate other cultures and religions?

When you read or hear about wars, natural disasters and human suffering across the globe, do you ever wonder if the world really is spinning out of control? Do you believe that human action or inaction can affect these kinds of events?

Both the Gnostics and the Kabbalists passed on their beliefs and teachings one on one. What are some of the other similarities -- and differences -- between the Kabbalists and the Gnostics?

How do you think the legend of the Lamed Vovniks pertains to our world today?

Discuss the meaning of the Jewish concept which teaches that if you save one life, it is as if you have saved the entire world, and that if you destroy a life, it is the same as destroying the entire world. How do you save the entire world by saving one life? And how would you destroy the whole world if you destroyed one life?

The letters that spell the Hebrew word for life – *chai* – are also used to write the Hebrew number 18. Can you think of any other ways that numbers and letters can be substituted for one another or used interchangeably in our world today?

David was one person who made a difference in **THE BOOK OF NAMES**. Can you cite other examples of one person who made a difference in the world – for good or for evil? Discuss the power of one person in the fight to make a difference.

[www.jillgregory.net](http://www.jillgregory.net)

[www.karentintori.com](http://www.karentintori.com)