

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think it was right for Dona Antonia to hide the family's faith from José and Reyna? What would you have done in a similar situation?
2. How did you feel when José sent Tamar away? Did you understand his decision? Why or why not? What do you think Tamar's life was like in Tiberias and beyond?
3. Discuss the similarities and differences between Dona Antonia and Reyna. In what way does Dona Antonia shape Reyna as she becomes an adult and mother herself? Who do you imagine Tamar grew up to be like?
4. Marie Rumie displays immense courage when she agrees to take in David as her own. During World War II, countless families were saved during the Holocaust by righteous Christians willing to risk their own lives and families to hide Jews in their homes. How do you think you would have reacted if you had found yourself in Marie's situation?
5. Both José Nissim and David Herzikova never had the opportunity to know their birth parents, as both sets of parents were murdered as a result of their religious affiliation. How do you think the experience of being orphaned in such a similarly traumatic manner shaped both men? In what ways are their journeys toward self-discovery and healing similar, and in what ways are those journeys different?
6. By the end of his life, we learn about David Herzikova's mindset through the letter he writes to his estranged brother, Edward, and in particular through this passage:

"I'll not mince words with you now. I'm dying, Edward. And nothing of the past seems to matter now. I have a daughter. Her name is Hannah. It may sound silly, but I do not exaggerate when I tell you that she is the most precious thing I have in this world. All the hurt is gone. The bitterness has faded, and for the first time in my life, I can see clearly. She is all that matters to me. And it is my greatest fear that when I die, she'll be left alone in this world."

Do you imagine that José Nissim felt similarly or differently about his own daughter toward the end of his life? Do you think he regretted his decision or was he absolutely convinced of the righteousness of his act throughout his lifetime?
7. We know that José Nissim could not tolerate the idea of his daughter marrying outside the faith that his parents had died for. Had David Herzikova lived just a few months longer, do you think he would have disapproved or welcomed Hannah's relationship with Selim?
8. Discuss the relationship that Selim and Hannah share. Is their bond romantic or perhaps, something more?

9. Although Selim and Hannah do not end up sharing their lives with one another, there still considered to be “soul-mates.” Do you think they will meet again in another lifetime, or have their destined paths finally veered off in different directions? Is the universe satisfied, or are the stars aligning for yet another reunion, in another lifetime? Discuss the term “soul-mate.” What does it mean to you?

10. Selim Osman and Edward Rumie both struggle to come to terms with past sins and lost brothers. How are their struggles similar, and in what ways are they unique? Does either of them ever find the redemption they are seeking? Why or why not?

11. In the last chapter, Ayda states the following to Hannah: “You knew him. I mean *really* knew him, without all the noise and clutter and misunderstanding that comes with knowing too many details of a person’s family history. It’s one of the reasons he loved you so.”

Do you agree or disagree with Ayda? Can learning *too much* about a person’s family get in the way of getting to know the person?

12. Do you feel satisfied that The Debt was repaid, or might there be other ways in which it lingers on?