

TATAE'S PROMISE — YOU WILL LIVE . . . YOU WILL TELL

Book Club Discussion Points

- **Destruction by Fire — Synagogues and Book Burnings**

In Chapter One, Hinda and her father witnessed their local synagogue burn to the ground. Considering that Hitler believed the Jewish “race” was inferior, why would the Third Reich government, under his leadership, attack the Jewish religion and issue orders for all synagogues in German occupied Poland to be destroyed?

In Chapter Nine, the Nazis burned Salomon’s books and all sacred texts from his personal library, including antique books inherited from his father, and some he had saved from the yeshiva. What feelings did you experience during this incident? Why did the Third Reich government issue orders for Jewish texts to be destroyed by fire? Why did the Nazi officer force Salomon to pour the gasoline and ignite the fire himself?

- **Family Separations**

In 1934, Salomon Mondlak made the decision to get his seven oldest children out of Poland, out of Europe, sending them across the Atlantic to North America for safety and to seek better lives. Review the second half of Chapter Two, which describes the economic and political circumstances. What would you do in Salomon and Esther’s situation?

- **Livelihood**

Imagine what it would be like for you and your family, if the current government suddenly—without notice—closed all businesses owned and operated by your specific ethnic group, which stripped you of your livelihood. In addition, what if the government prohibited your access to multiple food sources? How would your family handle it? Reflect upon how the Mondlaks dealt with the loss of income while also being barred from the forests—where they were accustomed to gathering mushrooms and berries—and forbidden from fishing in the rivers, all of which affected their food supply.

- **Ransacking and Arrests**

The Mondlaks endured their home being ransacked with all valuables seized by Nazi Soldiers, and being told they must wear a compulsory armband marking them as Jews. On that same day, they also grieved when their family member, Joel, was suddenly arrested and taken away with no explanation (Chapter Eleven). Reflect upon the gamut of emotions the Mondlak family members experienced in that one, single day.

- **Property Seizure**

The Mondlaks suffered an egregious loss due to Third Reich government orders when they were forcibly taken from their rightful home in Zielun. Although they legally owned the land and the house upon it, the property was confiscated by the Nazi Regime for one lone reason: they were Jews. The family was powerless to change the unjust edict (Chapter Fourteen). Consider how Hinda and her family behaved, and the items they packed, not knowing where they were being taken.

- **Tell the Truth, or Not**

Review Hinda's dilemma, just before she was arrested at the ghetto gates, about whether to use the Kowalski surname to potentially prevent arrest (Chapter Nineteen). She decided to tell the truth, used her Jewish surname—Mondlak, and went to jail. Why did she make this decision? Compare this to other scenes in the book where she readily lied to survive, get out of trouble, protect Rachel, or gain favor with the Auschwitz guards.

- **Motivations and Impact**

In the letter that Hinda's father wrote to her, before the Gestapo murdered him, he said that he knew for certain that Hinda would live, and she would tell (Chapter Forty-One). How could he have known for certain? Intuition seemed to run in the family, yet these are strong words of certitude. Compare the possibilities of whether this was a prophetic statement or one based on his implacable belief in her, written to inspire her to survive. Oftentimes, Hinda repeated her father's words to quash her fear. Other times, she used them to propel her into action. Explore those scenes. (Chapters 80, 98, and 100 contain examples.)

- **Instincts**

Hinda's mother said that Hinda was blessed with "good instincts." What does this term mean? Reflect upon the ways Hinda employed her instincts or didn't at critical times?

- **The Selection**

In Chapter Fifty-Four, when chaos erupted during the *Selection* process at Auschwitz, Hinda grabbed her sister, Rachel, and pulled her into the line with her. The chaos in the crowd was due to the shock and horror of watching infants be slaughtered. How was Hinda able to think astutely and act quickly amidst armed guards and such hideous cruelty?

- **Emotional Impact**

Hinda, Rachel, and Wolf endured brutal treatment. Content wise, which chapters or incidents did you experience as emotionally challenging to read? Elaborate on why.

- **Walter Zeilhofen**

Reflect upon Dr. Walter's journey from medical-school graduation to working for the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele to meeting Hinda at Auschwitz. Examine the role Walter played in Hinda's life and her ultimate triumph.

- **Josef Mengele**

Contemplate Dr. Josef Mengele's obsession with racial science and the atrocities he committed in the name of genetic research, all for the purpose of creating a "pure" Aryan race. Which actions of his did you find shocking?

- **Starvation**

In Chapter Eighty-Five, Hinda takes a diamond from a confiscated suitcase and trades it for food. She had subsisted on a starvation diet for years almost three years in the ghetto before being incarcerated at Auschwitz. Then, the already meager Auschwitz rations were reduced once again, and she experienced such corporeal hunger that she took the risk of being executed. Reflect upon the way she handled this with the guard. Consider what your actions and attitudes would have been if you experienced such ravenous hunger. Factor in

the additional physical conditions, including weakness and brain fog, that would accompany severe malnutrition.

- **The Escape**

Evaluate Hinda's escape plan, and how she executed it. What personal qualities did Hinda draw upon to go through with the plan (Step One; Step Two, Step Three), and the ensuing events that occurred afterward.

- **Wolf**

Evaluate the character and personality traits of Wolf Yoskowitz. Which traits most supported his survival? . . . and why?

- **Hinda**

Hinda Mondlak was a remarkably bold, savvy, and courageous woman. Which scenes in the book inspired you? . . . upset you? . . . intrigued you?

- **Rachel**

Rachel was sensitive, an artist at heart. Evaluate her strengths and her weaknesses. . . .and in the scope of her relationship with Hinda.

- **Sara**

Hinda's youngest sister, Sara, was three years old when the older brothers and Fannie left home for foreign lands. She was eight years old when Germany invaded Poland and the family was moved to the ghetto. Was there one specific incident that triggered her mutism? What personality traits of hers did you find endearing, intriguing, or frustrating? . . . and why?

- **Hinda's Survival**

Reflect upon all that happened to Hinda from the time she was eighteen to when she was thirty-two years old. Put yourself in Hinda's place. How would you have handled all the grievous losses she experienced and all the abuse, physical/mental/emotional, that she endured?

- **Bold Actions**

When Hinda and Rachel were faced with boarding a bus bound for Siberia, which would have resulted in a life-long sentence in a Siberian labor camp, Hinda asked to speak to the highest person in command (Chapter One Hundred Eight). Reflect upon her courage and shrewdness. What would you have done in this situation?

- **Russian Soldiers**

Hinda's fear of Russian soldiers bordered upon a phobia. Consider the train trip to Katowice (Chapter One Hundred Eleven), where she and Rachel locked themselves in the bathroom for two days because Hinda was so terrified of the Russian soldiers on the train. Later, in Wroclaw, Hinda had the opportunity, via her cousin Azik, to have a job working for the Soviets. Although she was fiercely independent, wanting to pay her own way while living in the Jewish compound, she remained adamant about not working for or with the Russians. Reflect upon her actions and the consequences in both scenarios.

- **Humanity**

Hinda harbored a deep hatred for the Nazis, which was understandable. She often struggled with her distrust and fear of Germans, in general. Yet, there were German people who showed her kindness. Reflect upon those situations and how they impacted Hinda and Rachel's journey to freedom.

- **Awareness—Looking the Other Way**

At the end of the war, it is estimated that some 14 million people (including Jews, male homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, and Romanis) were killed. That number does not include those who were displaced from their homes and survived concentration camps. How and why did the German people turn a blind eye to such mass genocide of innocent people under the reign of their leader, Adolph Hitler, and his team, known as The Third Reich?

- **Recommendations**

Who would you recommend this book to and why? Any caveats?