

The Chosen



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHAIM POTOK

Chaim Potok was born into an Orthodox Jewish family of Polish immigrants. His parents did not allow non-Jewish books in the home so Potok would go to his local library to read novels. He started writing fiction at age 16 but also became a Conservative rabbi after attending the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Potok put this latter skill to use as a chaplain in the US army during the Korean War from 1955-1957. He returned and attended graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania and then moved to Brooklyn where he became a professor and editor of Jewish publications. He published *The Chosen* in 1967, which was his first and most critically acclaimed novel. Potok went on to write many more novels and essays all of which revolved around Jewish themes and topics, but he was hesitant to call himself solely a “Jewish novelist.” He believed that the conflicts of tradition and modernity were widely applicable to many aspects of American life.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Chosen is set during World War II – a brutal worldwide war and an especially fraught period in Jewish American history. The novel begins with the Allied offensive in WWII and chronicles the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the general public’s and American Jewry’s discovery of the horrors of the Holocaust, and the fight for and founding of the Jewish state of Israel. Potok paints a nuanced picture of Jewish Americans in the period by revealing the diverse range of reactions that the Holocaust brought out in different American Jewish communities. Historical events affect the characters in the novel as much as personal ones do.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In 1969, Potok published a sequel to *The Chosen* called *The Promise*, which follows Reuven into his years after college. All of Potok’s novels deal with issues of Jewish-American life such as the conflict between tradition and modernity. In addition to novels, Potok also wrote a historical account of the Jews titled, *Wandering: Chaim Potok’s Story of the Jews*. Of all his characters Potok related most to the protagonist in his 1972 novel, *My Name is Asher Lev*, who lives in an Orthodox Jewish family but wants to be a painter.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Chosen*

- **When Written:** 1967
- **Where Written:** Brooklyn, NY
- **When Published:** 1967
- **Genre:** A Bildungsroman, or coming of age story, focusing on two young men: Reuven Malter and Danny Saunders.
- **Setting:** Williamsburg, Brooklyn during and after WWII.
- **Climax:** The climax of the novel comes in the last chapter when Reb Saunders reveals to his son that he accepts his choice to break with tradition and lets him go.
- **Point of View:** First person through Reuven Saunders.

EXTRA CREDIT

Original title. *The Chosen* was not Potok’s original title for the novel. His first title was *A Space for Silence*.

The tradition continues. Lee Avenue in Williamsburg, Brooklyn is still filled with Hasidic Jews and looks largely as it is described in the novel.



PLOT SUMMARY

Reuven Malter, the narrator, starts *The Chosen* by describing his native Williamsburg: a neighborhood of Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, who almost never mix or interact. After establishing the setting, the action begins with a softball game. Reuven’s team is playing a Hasidic team on which Danny Saunders is a key player. During a rough game, Danny ends up hitting a softball directly into Reuven’s **eye**, causing his glasses to shatter, and sending him to Brooklyn Memorial Hospital. After a surgery Reuven seems to be healing well but there is a chance that he will be blind in one eye.

Danny comes to the hospital to apologize and Reuven refuses to speak with him. Finally, with Mr. Malter’s urging, Danny and Reuven do speak and feel a great connection to each other. Reuven’s eye heals well and Danny and Reuven become best friends.

The rest of the novel depicts Reuven and Danny’s navigation of adolescent life, but they do not have the typical concerns of teenage boys. They are growing up during WWII in different but both very religious Jewish communities and most of their time is spent discussing academics, religion, Jewish culture and tradition as shown by their nearly constant study of the **Talmud**. Danny’s father, Reb Saunders, is the tzaddic (religious leader) of his Hasidic community and Danny is supposed to eventually take his place. This position has been passed down through his family for generations but Danny does not want to become a rabbi. He wants to be a psychologist. On top of this, Reb Saunders believes in bringing up his son in complete

silence, so Danny feels utterly alone, and truly needs his friendship with Reuven. Reuven and his father help Danny through his difficult choice to break with tradition and possibly form a life outside of the only culture he knows.

Reuven and Danny go to Hirsch College together and Danny delves even deeper into psychology as his major. Then disaster strikes for Reuven and Danny's friendship when Reb Saunders forbids his son to speak with Reuven because of Danny's father's Zionist activities. Danny's father has been working to support the creation of a Jewish state in Israel as a response to the horrors of the Holocaust. He believes that it is the responsibility of American Jews to maintain the Jewish faith after such destruction. Reb Saunders believes that this is blasphemous; he disagrees with the idea of a secular Jewish state. In Reb Saunders' mind a Jewish home in Israel should only exist after the coming of the Messiah. He believes that Jews must accept the horrors that have happened as God's will and continue to wait for the Messiah. These radically different religious responses to Jewish suffering break apart Reuven and Danny's friendship for two years.

When Israel becomes a reality, and more Jews (including a Hirsch College alum) are dying to defend the state, Reb Saunders finally gives in. Danny and Reuven begin speaking again but Reuven now hates Reb Saunders. Reb Saunders keeps asking to see Reuven, but Reuven continues to make excuses. Finally Mr. Malter tells his son that Reb Saunders clearly wants to tell him something and that he should never refuse to listen to another person. Reuven agrees to go to the Saunders home. Reb Saunders tells Reuven, while Danny is still in the room, that he knows that Danny wants to become a psychologist. He goes on to explain why he used silence to bring up his son: he saw from an early age that his son was brilliant, but also saw that he had no soul. He wanted to teach Danny about suffering and pain through silence. Reb Saunders says that even if his son would not become a tzaddic, he wants him to have the soul of a tzaddic. Reb Saunders then speaks to his son about something other than the Talmud for the first time since he was a small child. Danny promises to keep the Ten Commandments and soon after Reb Saunders shares the news that Danny will not be following him as tzaddic with his congregation. They eventually are able accept that Danny's little brother Levi will become the next tzaddic. Danny goes to Columbia to study psychology and says goodbye to Danny and Mr. Malter, promising to come see them soon.

living in Williamsburg, Brooklyn with his father, David Malter, and a housekeeper, Manya. He is a smart, athletic, popular and thoughtful young man and spends much of his time and energy on academic and religious study. He is especially talented at mathematics, but wants to be a rabbi when he grows up. *The Chosen* follows Reuven's friendship with Danny Saunders. They meet when Danny hits a softball in Reuven's **eye** nearly **blinding** him, and they hate each other at first, but soon come to realize that they were meant to be fast friends. The rest of the novel follows this pair from Reuven's perspective as they both negotiate their relationship to Judaism, tradition, and the modern world within the complicated setting of World War II, the horrifying news of the Holocaust, and the founding of a Jewish state is Israel.

Danny Saunders – Danny is the other protagonist of the novel and Reuven's best friend. They despise each other at the start, but quickly become close confidants. Danny desperately needs a friend like Reuven as he has a particularly difficult adolescence. Danny is the eldest son of a Hasidic Jewish tzaddic (religious leader) and as such is expected to take over his position. Danny is incredibly brilliant and does not want to remain in the closed, traditional world of Hasidism. He finds escape in academic study and hopes to become a psychologist one day. During the length of the novel he has to learn how to communicate this radical choice to his traditional and deeply religious father, Reb Saunders.

David Malter – Reuven's father and an Orthodox Jew, Mr. Malter teaches Jewish studies and writes academic papers on the subject. He has created an educated and religious home for his son and teaches him from early on how to be caring, thoughtful and honest. After World War II Mr. Malter also becomes a supporter and leader of the Zionist movement. His work in this cause as well as his controversial religious papers make him hated by the Hasidic community, but for most of the novel Reb Saunders greatly respects Mr. Malter and his work. Mr. Malter also acts as a father figure to Danny, introducing him to secular authors and providing guidance in lieu of his actual, silent father. Mr. Malter is also sickly from the beginning of the novel, and only becomes more ill as he works himself to the bone trying accomplish what he believes is his life cause: to create a Jewish state is Israel.

Reb Isaac Saunders – The religious leader, or tzaddic, of his Hasidic community in Williamsburg, Reb Saunders feels a great weight on his shoulders for the entirety of the novel. He is a very strict Hasid, who puts great faith in the value of his culture and traditions. He brings up his son, Danny, in a very strict and traditional manner as well, which involves almost absolute **silence**. He only speaks to his son when they are studying the **Talmud**. Reb Saunders has had a very difficult life. He is from Russia and was there during the anti-Semitic Cossack raids during which his first wife and child were killed in front of his eyes. After this he took his entire Jewish community through



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Reuven Malter – The novel's narrator and protagonist, Reuven grows up over the course of the novel, starting as fifteen year old and ending as a college graduate. He is an Orthodox Jew

Europe to America to start a new life. As a leader of his community he believes that he has to take on the suffering of his followers. When the Holocaust happens this becomes an even greater burden.

Mr. Galanter – Reuven’s softball coach, who is of fighting age but mysteriously not a soldier. He makes frequent allusions to battle and war during their game, calling his players “soldiers,” which only brings more attention to his suspicious lack of uniform. He takes Reuven to the hospital after he injures his **eye** in a softball game.

Rav Gershenson – An Orthodox rabbi and the professor of the highest-level **Talmud** course at Hirsch College. He teaches both Reuven and Danny and is a formidable and intimidating presence at the school. Reuven comes to learn that Gershenson is not as traditional as he seems but must repress some of his more radical ideas to teach at this highly conservative college.

Professor Nathan Appleman – Danny’s psychology teacher at Hirsch College, Appleman teaches his students the value of experimental psychology, which must be backed up by data and tests. Danny hates this at first, but after he talks with Appleman comes to realize that he is a kind and smart man. Danny learns about the value of modern scientific reasoning, which greatly differs from his traditional upbringing and original affinity to Freud, through Appleman.

Billy Merrit – The blonde, angelic and blind boy in the bed next to Reuven’s in the hospital. Billy is eternally hopeful and sweet and talks about how he is going to receive a new surgery to regain his sight. He became blind when in a car accident that also killed his mother. After Reuven leaves the hospital he finds out that Billy’s operation was unsuccessful.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Levi Saunders – Reb Saunders’ son and Danny’s brother, Levi is a sickly child who never speaks in the entire novel. He is also second in line after Danny to take his father’s place as tzaddic.

Manya – The Malter’s Russian housekeeper and cook who tends the house for Reuven and his father.

Tony Savo – The boxer Reuven meets while in the hospital, Mr. Savo shows an outside perspective from the highly educated, Jewish population of the novel. Mr. Savo, who eventually has to have his eye removed, regrets becoming a boxer and warns Reuven to be wary of “religious fanatics” like Danny.

Roger Merrit – Billy’s father who was driving the car when his wife died and son was blinded. He is not fighting in the war because he has to take care of his children.

Dr. Snyderman – Reuven’s doctor who also treats Mr. Savo and Billy. He successfully operates on Reuven’s eye.

Mickey – A little boy in the hospital who plays catch with Tony Savo. Mickey has been in the hospital his whole life because of a

stomach condition.

Sidney Goldberg – Reuven’s friend and fellow softball player.

Davey Cantor – A player on Reuven’s baseball team who warns Reuven about the rough tendencies of Danny and his softball team.

Dov Shlomowitz – A giant player on Danny’s Hasidic softball team.

Mrs. Carpenter – The kind yet stern nurse at Brooklyn Memorial Hospital.

Solomon Maimon – An 18th century Polish Jew who left Hasidism to study philosophy in Germany. In spite of his brilliance he was never content and died alone in France in the home of a kindly Christian friend. David Malter tells Reuven in chapter 6 that Danny reminds him of Solomon Maimon.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



JUDAISM AND TRADITION

The Chosen takes place in an Orthodox community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn that is shaped by Jewish faith and customs. Chaim Potok highlights the influence of Judaism on his characters by filling his novel with references to and quotes from the Talmud (a book of Jewish laws and lessons) and the Torah. Reuven Malter and Danny Saunders, although they are teenage boys, think more about complex interpretations of Jewish texts than they do about girls, sports, or general adolescent preoccupations. They are both shaped by the expectations and values of their families and neighbors in their isolated yet highly educated community.

The Chosen is not simply a Jewish book for Jewish readers, although it was the first widely read and popular book of its time to depict such a world. The people in this community are clearly separated from the rest of America, but Potok takes care to demonstrate that many of their struggles are the same. Danny fights against his family’s expectations in order to follow his own dream for his own life. As Danny works to find his place in the world he has to struggle with distant treatment from his father (based on Hasidic tradition) and the knowledge of the complex and often conflicted history of the Hasidic sect. In other words he has a complicated relationship with his dad and a complex cultural past, which he learns about as he ages. Taken out of a Jewish context, his path is like that of many other smart ambitious Americans, or any Faulkner novel.

The Chosen also focuses on the thin line between different sorts

of Jewish faith, and between piousness and fanaticism in both religion and life. Hasidic Judaism, with its strict rules based on hundreds of years of tradition, demonstrates how close piety can be to fanaticism. Reb Saunders and his family and followers are deeply devout but there are costs to their religious and cultural inflexibility. Danny has to live through years of silence from his father because of a Hasidic tradition, and Reb Saunders breaks apart Danny and Reuven's friendship for two years again because of his religious beliefs. David Malter, orthodox but not Hasidic, provides an example of an equally pious yet more open-minded father figure, yet he also nearly works himself to death because of a fanatical obsession with Zionism (the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine). *The Chosen's* geographically and culturally narrow focus on Jews in Brooklyn leads the reader towards larger questions about a blind obsession with the rules of tradition and religion.



CHOOSING AND BEING CHOSEN

The title, *The Chosen*, introduces this theme immediately into the novel. First of all, in a novel about Jewish people and culture the term carries a religious meaning: the idea written in the Torah that Jews are the people chosen by God. This means that practicing Jews believe that they have a specific and exclusive order to follow and obey God. "Chosenness," as it is called, is seen in the way that Danny and Reuven's fathers teach them the responsibility that they have towards God and Jewish laws and customs. The novel then brings up the question of responsibility among chosen people: is there free will within this structure, or must the characters only follow the path given to them as chosen people?

This conflict of choice plays out in the relationship between Danny Saunders and his father, Reb Saunders. Danny is supposed to follow in his father's footsteps as the next tzaddic (leader of the Hasidic community). His family has passed this role down through six generations, and Reb Saunders has been preparing his son since he was a small child. Danny, on the other hand, is interested in psychology and Freud, and does not want to become a rabbi. Much of the novel focuses on Danny's guilt and confusion over whether he should follow his dreams or his familial and religious responsibility. His choice to veer from what seems to be his fate, and his father's acceptance of his new secular life path, demonstrates the value of individual choice within the novel. In a world of so much tradition and religious responsibility, Potok argues for the value of individual choice.

Danny and Reuven's friendship shows a combination of both choosing and being chosen. They seem almost thrown together by fate in the dramatic softball game that starts the novel. Yet although it seems like they should hate each other after Danny injures and nearly blinds Reuven, David Malter encourages them to choose to become friends. Events often seem to be set

in motion by a higher power in *The Chosen*, but the characters must choose to take action on them. David Malter says this himself when he argues for the importance of making something of one's life: "A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life."



FATHERS, SONS, AND REBELLION

The Chosen revolves around male relationships and the most important of these is that between a father and a son. Both Danny and Reuven are deeply influenced by their fathers. Both of their relationships are based on education, but they differ in every other way. Reb Saunders only speaks with his son when they are studying the Talmud because of Hasidic tradition and, as we learn later in the novel, a belief in the importance of silence as a tool for developing compassion. For much of the novel this silence seems irrational and cruel, demonstrating the confusion and mystery that can be a part of father-son relationships. What seems to be cruel treatment is a sacrifice for Reb Saunders as well. He chooses to act this way because he believes that he is saving his son's soul. His methods are questionable but we come to learn the great love that he has for his son.

David Malter also teaches his son how to read the Talmud using close reading and careful thought. Reuven is greatly influenced by his father, and he eventually proves his intellectual maturity and prowess by using his father's reading techniques in his college Talmudic course with his respected and difficult teacher, Rav Gershenson. David Malter also extends this teaching to other parts of life, encouraging Reuven to become friends with Danny, and to look closely at and take care with this friendship once he has it. David Malter is the prime example of a careful and thoughtful father and he also provides guidance to Danny when he cannot turn to his real father.

Rebellion is also an important aspect of the father son relationships in *The Chosen*. Danny directly rebels against his father by not becoming a tzaddic, and this choice of rebellion plagues him for the entire novel. His long path towards this decision is reflected in his growing interest in Freud. Although Freud's concept of the Oedipal Complex (which includes rebellion of the son against the father) is never directly mentioned, his interest in and struggle with Freud points towards the importance of this fraught relationship with his father.

With all of this focus on fathers it is also necessary to mention the lack of mothers, and female figures in general, in *The Chosen*. Reuven's mother died when he was very young and is only briefly discussed. Danny's mother is alive, and presented as warm and loving, but she is also sick and frail. Danny's sister is only briefly married and has an arranged marriage with a man who leaves a bad taste in Reuven's mouth. Overall women are powerless and only ever seen on the fringes. Men are victims of

a set culture and deep traditions, but they have their intellectual pursuits to occupy their minds and set them free if they truly want to. Women, on the other hand, are stuck. This marginalization of women is present in Hasidic societies, and Potok does critique it in some ways, but *The Chosen* is also largely uninterested in the role of women in this culture.



FRIENDSHIP

The first sentence in the book starts with a mention of Danny Saunders, the narrator Reuven Malter's future best friend. This sets up what will be the most important relationship in the book: friendship. They meet as enemies during a brutal softball game in which Danny injures and nearly blinds Reuven, but they become fast friends when Danny comes to visit Reuven in the hospital for the second time.

The origin of this relationship demonstrates that friendship is not simply a fun, casual thing. It is also a serious and deep bond. David Malter tells Reuven the importance of friendship early on in the novel, "You know what a friend is, Reuven? A Greek philosopher said that two people who are true friends are like two bodies with one soul." He also reminds Reuven of a saying from the Talmud that a person should "choose a friend." This reference to the title demonstrates that in a world where so much is determined at birth, friendship is a choice that one can use to shape a life.

Through their friendship Danny and Reuven are introduced to new world and gain a new perspective on their own lives. Danny learns about his father through Reuven because Reb Saunders communicates with Danny through his friend. Reb Saunders, by his own choice, cannot speak with his son, so he talks to Reuven about Danny while Danny is in the room. He does this because he knows that Reuven is an important, kind and intelligent figure in his son's life. This again demonstrates the great influence that friendship can have, the way that it can open an individual to new perspectives.

Through the ability to discuss life with a peer, friendship provides an outlet for these boys. In the end they almost switch roles: Danny who is supposed to be a rabbi chooses to become a clinical psychologist, and Reuven who is supposed to be a mathematician chooses to become a rabbi. The ending leaves open the possibility that their friendship is waning as they enter new stages of their lives, but Danny and Reuven have clearly had a permanent impact on each other.



WORLD WAR II AND WAR

The Chosen starts with a battle, or a near battle, in the form of a softball game between Reuven Malter's school team and Danny Saunders's infamously brutal Hasidic team. The Hasidic team plays with such brutality because they have been told that the only way

that they will be allowed to have a team is if they make it their religious duty to beat the "apikorsim" (Jews who do not believe in god, or in this case are not Hasidic). This immediately introduces the idea of cultural or religious differences as a reason for battle or war.

They are also playing softball because of America's entry into war. Jews felt the need to "show the gentile world that Yeshiva students were as physically fit, despite their long hours of study, as other American students." During the game Reuven Malter's coach, Mr. Galanter, calls him and his teammates "soldiers," especially as the game becomes more violent, ending in Reuven's injury. Although this is the last mention of softball in the book, war continues to serve as the background for almost the entire novel. Reuven and his father follow the battles of World War II, first on the radio in the hospital and then aided by maps cut out from the newspaper and hung all over their home.

After the actual battles end, the news of the Holocaust has an even greater impact on their lives. The pain and horror caused by the atrocities of the Holocaust brings David Malter out of his isolated community and into the wider world. David Malter becomes an important leader in the Zionist movement (a push for a Jewish state in Palestine) and the first mention of Manhattan (or any area that the family has been to outside Brooklyn) comes when he attends a Zionist movement at Madison Square Garden. His son does not go, further highlighting that this is a great distance for the Malters. WWII and its aftermath brought this small Brooklyn community into global affairs.

The discussion of a Jewish homeland also creates conflict in Williamsburg, highlighting the differences between the different sects that live so close together. The Hasidic Jews are violently against Zionism because they fear the possibility of a secular Jewish state, other Jews in the community believe that it is important to take action now that 6 million of their people have been killed, and that Jews need a country that they can make safe for their people, whether or not they are deeply devout.

Through the fights and arguments that break out on the streets and in school, *The Chosen* demonstrates different perspectives on how to deal with suffering. The Hasidic view is to take on the suffering of others and deal with it through silence, prayer and study of God, all while continuing to wait for the coming of the Messiah. Other Orthodox Jews, like David Malter, believe that action must be taken to save the Jewish community--in this case a Jewish state. He believes that they can wait no longer and so in spite of his orthodox views he works to bring even non-practicing Jews over to his cause. WWII endangers the future of Judaism and *The Chosen* depicts how different Jewish Americans separate from yet affected by Holocaust can to react.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



EYES AND BLINDNESS

Reuven's injured and nearly blinded eye plays a key role in *The Chosen* from early on in the novel. Even after he heals the threat of blindness continues. In a world that so honors knowledge, the ability to perceive and receive information regarding both the outside world and oneself is of great importance. The novel is punctuated by moments of single-minded hatred or blind misunderstanding, which can only be overcome through careful observation. Mr. Malter also uses the eye as a symbol of life when he lectures his son on the need to make an impact during his short time on earth: "the eye that blinks, that is something." Potok adds power to his use of the eye by depicting them as a means of communication as well as perception. Reuven and Danny communicate with their eyes when they are not allowed to talk; Mr. Malter's eyes become dark when he is angry; and Reb Saunders asserts that he knew of Danny's choice to become a psychologist by stating that he could "see his eyes."



SILENCE

The characters of *The Chosen* continually debate the value of silence and partial resolution comes only in the last pages of the novel. Moments of silence range from casual and comfortable to cold and painful. The pain of silence arises because silence is always accompanied (for both the characters and the reader) with a lack of explanation. Each character must learn the meaning and use of silence for himself. This points to the fact that silence in *The Chosen* represents introspection and self-knowledge. At the same time silence can also represent great connection and understanding between two people. Reb Saunders wishes that everyone could communicate without words. Reuven finds this ridiculous at first but then learns that Reb Saunders truly understood his son in spite of the fact that they never spoke to each other. The space left by silence is a powerful tool in *The Chosen*, leaving room for thought, pain, instruction and communion.



THE TALMUD

The Chosen could leave a reader with the impression that the Talmud is the most important Jewish text. The characters spend little time discussing the Torah (the Jewish bible and most holy of texts), and instead focus on the Talmud, an ancient interpretive work that provides commentary from various well respected rabbis on Jewish law and customs. All of the characters are highly religious Jews so it

is incredibly unlikely that they are not reading the Torah. Potok chooses to focus on the Talmud instead to demonstrate the importance of interacting with and interpreting established knowledge, customs, and tradition. Judaism is greatly concerned with such interpretation (as shown by the very existence of the Talmud), and the characters' focus on the Talmud demonstrates their own personal relationship with this tradition.




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Fawcett edition of *The Chosen* published in 1987.

●● What annoyed him was their fanatic sense of righteousness, their absolute certainty that they and they alone had God's ear, and every other Jew was wrong, totally wrong, a sinner, a hypocrite, an apikoros, and doomed, therefore, to burn in hell.

Related Characters: David Malter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis


In the first chapter of the novel, we're introduced to the tense relationship between two types of Judaism: Hasidic Judaism and Orthodox Judaism. Reuven and his father, David Malter, are Orthodox Jews, who believe in obeying the laws of the Torah (the holy book of Judaism, and the first part of the Christian Old Testament). In this scene, Reuven is playing a game of baseball against a group of Hasidic boys: Jews who consider themselves the "original" Orthodox Jews, and who believe that they have a responsibility to act as religious leaders within their community.

As Reuven reports, his father resents the Hasidic Jews for what he perceives as their self-righteousness. The Hasidic Jews, we're told, believe that they and they alone have the love of God. The irony of the scene, of course, is that from the perspective of most Americans (certainly in New York, where the novel is set), the Hasidic and Orthodox Jews are more or less identical. Instead of focusing on the 99% of their beliefs that they share with the Orthodox, the Hasidic Jews in the scene focus on the 1% of their beliefs that are different: a classic example of what Freud called the "narcissism of petty differences." (For that matter, the critique of Hasidic Judaism that David makes here could easily be applied to Judaism as a whole: the Jews claim to be God's "chosen people," thus making all other religions

wrong.)

☝ I felt myself suddenly very angry, and it was at that point that for me the game stopped being merely a game and became a war.

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis



In the opening scene of the novel, Reuven and his friends play a game of softball against a group of Hasidic Jews. Although it's "just a game," Reuven feels himself competing with the Hasidic Jews for *religious* reasons--it's as if both sides are fighting over who the "real" Jews are.


The scene is full of symbolic undertones. Keep in mind that the characters are playing a game of softball--an all-American sport. Thus, the scene is a metaphor for the way that different ethnic groups (the Hasidic and Orthodox Jews) compete with one another under the facade of assimilating with American culture. Furthermore, note that the warlike game of softball takes place at the same time as an *actual* American war: America's involvement in World War II, a war that was fought partly to end the extermination of Jews in the Holocaust. Ironically, Reuven is "warring" with other Jews when--it's implied--he should be joining forces with them against anti-Semites around the world.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ "Things are always what they seem to be, Reuven? Since when?"

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reuven Malter

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Mr. Malter angrily tells his son Reuven to


question his assumptions about other people. Reuven, who's in the hospital with a ruined eye, claims that Danny Saunders (his opponent in the softball game) deliberately tried to hurt his eye with a softball. Mr. Malter tells Reuven not to jump to conclusions based on what "seems" to be true: instead, he must weigh the facts and assess all the evidence.

Mr. Malter's advice is both rational and deeply emotional. On one hand, he's trying to teach his kid to be logical and rational; in other words, to be a good student and (one day) a great mathematician. On the other hand, Mr. Malter's words can be interpreted as a plea for tolerance and friendship: as we'll see, Reuven will use his father's advice as an inspiration for befriending Danny, the very boy who hurt him.

☝ I couldn't imagine what it was like to know that no matter whether my eyes were opened or closed it made no difference, everything was still dark.

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis



Reuven has been sent to the hospital after sustaining a nasty eye injury during a softball game. Reuven is told that there's a chance he could lose his vision in the injured eye--a possibility that he finds terrifying.

The passage is important because it suggests blindness as one of the key symbols of the book. In a novel about tolerance and understanding for other people, eyesight symbolizes the human soul's capacity to love those who are "different." Reuven's inability to imagine what blindness is like suggests his natural instinct to sympathize and empathize with others (except, notably, the blind)--an instinct that no amount of mob mentality can suppress. Finally, the image of blindness might symbolize Reuven's understanding of death. In the time of the Holocaust, death hangs over the entire Jewish community, and adds a sense of urgency to Reuven's friendship with Danny. When the Jewish community as a whole is under attack, Reuven and Danny should focus on what they have in common instead of becoming jealous rivals.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ “What I tried to tell you, Reuven, is that when a person comes to talk to you, you should be patient and listen. Especially if he has hurt you in any way.”

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reuven Malter, Danny Saunders

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Reuven has stubbornly refused to see Danny in the hospital. Danny has come to apologize to Reuven for injuring him in their game of softball, but Reuven refuses to listen to the apology. Reuven's father is disappointed with his son for being so stubborn. He reminds Reuven that the Talmud encourages Jews to practice love and tolerance at all times--especially tolerance of people who have caused others pain.

The notion that we should be compassionate to everyone--*especially* those who have hurt us--can be found in many world religions. Despite mentioning the Talmud, Reuven's father doesn't frame his advice in explicitly religious language in the passage, suggesting that Reuven owes Danny the chance to apologize for the sake of human decency more than anything else.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ “You know what a friend is, Reuven? A Greek philosopher said that two people who are true friends are like two bodies with one soul.”

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reuven Malter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Malter tells his son to befriend Danny Saunders-- the same boy who sent Reuven to the hospital in the first place. Mr. Malter suggests that Reuven's friendship with Danny is bigger and more significant than Reuven could possibly imagine. Friendship isn't just an interaction between two people: it's a vital, nearly sacred relationship.


Mr. Malter's advice to his son tells us a lot about his character. Malter doesn't care that Danny Saunders is of a

different religion than his son: he wants the Orthodox and Hasidic Jews to get along and move past the mob-like rivalries we saw in the first chapter of the book. Notice, too, that Mr. Malter doesn't cite Jewish texts at all in this passage; instead, he mentions Greek philosophy. That Malter would mention the Greeks' moral teachings, not the Talmud's, suggests that he's wide-ranging in his thinking, and embraces many different points of view. Just as Mr. Malter thinks that there's value in reading about other religions and ideologies, he thinks that there's value in a Hasidic and an Orthodox boy becoming friends.

☞ I stood in that room for a long time, watching the sunlight and listening to the sounds on the street outside. I stood there, tasting the room and the sunlight and the sounds ...

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Potok contrasts the silence of Mr. Malter with the ambient noises of New York City. Mr. Malter is a quiet, hard-working man, who believes in the beauty of silence, especially while he's working. While Potok seems to respect Mr. Malter's point of view, he also suggests, very subtly, that Malter is too limited and narrow in his worldview. To be silent in New York City is absurd: there'll always be a million sounds (sirens, cars, kids playing, etc.)-- sounds that, it's suggested, Reuven embraces but his father tries to ignore.

Symbolically, then, the passage suggests the difference between the ways that Reuven and his father view the world. In spite of his compassion and broad-mindedness, Mr. Malter might be too serious and focused in the way he perceives life. Reuven is looser and freer in his thinking: he embraces chance and uncertainty, and savors the uncontrollable sounds of the world around him.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ “We are like other people, Reuven. We do not survive disaster merely by appealing to invisible powers. We are as easily degraded as any other people.”

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reuven Malter

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis


In this chapter, Mr Malter tells Reuven about the Hasidic community in Brooklyn. As Malter sees it, the Hasidics have always been too superstitious; too willing to believe that God will protect them through all their trials and tribulations. In Poland, the Hasidic population endured tremendous suffering: the leaders of Poland slaughtered thousands of innocent Jews. Years later, during the Holocaust, Polish Jews were sent to concentration camps to die.

As Malter sees it, the Hasidics have always been too naive in their acceptance of "disaster." Instead of using logic and rationality to solve their problems, the Hasidics have always appealed to "invisible powers"--i.e., God.

It's important to notice how pain and suffering are integral parts of what it means to be Jewish, at least as Mr. Malter sees it. For a Jew, the question is--how do we respond to tragedy? In large part, the rivalries and arguments that we see between the different types of Judaism reflect Jewish communities' different responses to the historical tragedies that Mr. Malter alludes to here.

☛☛ "Reb Saunders' son is a terribly torn and lonely boy. There is literally no one in the world he can talk to. He needs a friend. The accident with the baseball has bound him to you, and he has already sensed in you someone he can talk to without fear."

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reb Isaac Saunders, Danny Saunders, Reuven Malter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis


Here Mr. Malter tells Reuven that Danny Saunders needs a friend. Danny Saunders has been raised to believe that he has been "chosen" to lead his community. Danny is only a kid--therefore, the burden of being a community leader is too much to bear. Danny needs someone to talk to about his burden, and his father is purposefully silent to him at all

times. Mr. Malter believes that Reuven can play such a role as Danny's friend.

The passage is interesting because of the reason Malter gives for Danny's friendship with Reuven: he claims that the very fact that Danny hurt Reuven binds them together as friends. While it's odd for Mr. Malter to make such a claim, the passage suggests that he sees the "silver lining" in every tragedy--just as the Jewish community has always moved past historical tragedy by looking ahead to the future. The passage also reinforces the sacred side of friendship: it's suggested that Danny and Reuven's friendship is bigger and more important than either one of them can fully understand--that in a sense they're fated to influence each other's lives.

☛☛ "Reuven, as you grow older you will discover that the most important things that will happen to you will often come as a result of silly things, as you call them -- 'ordinary things' is a better expression. That is the way the world is."

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reuven Malter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 110



Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the chapter, Mr. Malter gives Reuven some interesting advice: he claims that the most important events in a person's life are often the result of (what appears to be) random chance. While it appeared to be "silly things" that led Danny Saunders to hurt Reuven's eye with a softball, the accident has led to a friendship between the boys--a friendship that, Malter insists, is of vital importance to the entire Jewish community.

Mr. Malter's worldview suggests his faith in God. There are no accidents in life, he believes: everything is the product of God's work. And yet the fact that God has "planned" to bring Danny and Reuven together as friends doesn't automatically force Reuven to change his behavior. Reuven must choose to befriend Danny: he must choose whether or not to embrace God's plan for him, and for Danny.

☛☛ "I feel like a cowboy surrounded by Indians."

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Danny takes Reuven to the local (Hasidic) synagogue. Reuven has never spent so much time around so many Hasidic Jews; he's always stayed within the Orthodox community. Reuven feels awkward and "foreign" among the Hasids: he compares his situation to that of a cowboy surrounded by Indians.

Once again, Potok emphasizes the big differences between the two Jewish communities, Hasidic and Orthodox--differences which, while large from Reuven's perspective, are basically invisible to the majority of the world. At this point in the novel, Reuven still feels uncomfortable outside his own ethnic and religious group--he's too unfamiliar with Danny's community to feel at ease there. Cowboys and Indians are, traditionally speaking, enemies, suggesting that Reuven still feels some leftover antagonism with the Hasids.

Notice also that Reuven frames his discomfort in distinctly American terms. Reuven is an Orthodox Jew, but he shows his awareness of broader American culture (baseball, cowboys, etc.). Reuven is a Jew, but he's an American Jew.

“I didn't agree at all with his notions of the world as being contaminated. Albert Einstein is part of the world, I told myself. President Roosevelt is part of the world. The millions of soldiers fighting Hitler are part of the world.”

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker), Reb Isaac Saunders

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

Reuven listens to a sermon delivered by Reb Saunders, the leader of the Hasidic community in Williamsburg. Reb claims that without the laws of the Torah, the world is "contaminated"--i.e., it's a dirty, immoral place.

Privately, Reuven disagrees with what Reb says. The world isn't divided between good and evil, black and white, Hasidic and non-Hasidic. On the contrary, Reuven believes, there are plenty of "good" people who don't embrace the letter of the Torah: Einstein, Roosevelt, etc. Reuven's more nuanced view of the world suggests that he's more assimilated with

his American community: unlike Reb, he has respect for quintessentially American (and secular) figures like FDR.

“You think a friend is an easy thing to be? If you are truly his friend, you will discover otherwise.”

Related Characters: Reb Isaac Saunders (speaker), Reuven Malter, Danny Saunders

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

Reuven meets Reb Saunders, and Reb seems to approve of Reuven's friendship with Danny, in spite of the boys' religious differences. Like Reuven's father, Reb thinks of Danny and Reuven's friendship in large-scale, almost sacred terms. Danny and Reuven aren't just two boys spending time together--their relationship is broader and deeper than that. Reb insists that Reuven will soon discover how difficult it is to be a *true* friend to Danny.

Notice that while Reb alludes to the challenges of true friendship, he doesn't clarify what these challenges are. The implication is that no amount of teaching or lecturing can show Reuven how to be a good friend to Danny: he'll have to figure it out for himself. The passage suggests that *The Chosen* isn't just a book about friendship: it's a coming-of-age story in which Reuven's friendship will teach him valuable lessons about maturity and respect.

“Master of the Universe,” he almost chanted. “you gave me a brilliant son, and I have thanked you for him a million times. But you had to make him so brilliant?”

Related Characters: Reb Isaac Saunders (speaker), Reb Isaac Saunders, Danny Saunders

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Here Reuven tells Reb about the books Danny has been reading--books that, much to Reb's annoyance, have nothing to do with the Torah. Reb is impressed with his son's obvious intelligence (the intelligence that's led him to read so much) but he's equally irritated that Danny's intelligence has led him to focus more on psychology and history than

religion.

Reb's problem illustrates the pitfalls of being a father, and of being a community leader. Reb is grateful to have such a brilliant son, but he also knows that his son must (he feels) one day replace him as the leader of the Hasids. Thus, Danny needs to focus on his studies--specifically, his studies of the Torah. Ironically, Danny's brilliance and love for reading--the very qualities a Hasidic leader needs to have--are pulling him away from his religious duties.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ A spider had spun a web across the corner of the upper rail, and there was a housefly trapped in it now, its wings spread-eagled, glued to the strands of the web, its legs flaying the air frantically.

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 173


Explanation and Analysis


In this important bit of foreshadowing, Reuven sees a housefly trapped in a web, about to be eaten by a spider. Reuven is struck by the way the housefly wriggles in pain--it seems to know that it's about to be eaten. Symbolically, the scene anticipates the news of the Holocaust--the greatest tragedy to the Jewish people in the 20th century, and perhaps in recorded history. The nihilistic mood of the scene is surprising: Potok seems to suggest that death and suffering (symbolized by the fly's fate) are natural parts of the universe. The duty of the Jews, then, is to transcend inevitable death and suffering through the strength of their faith.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ It was as senseless, as – I held my breath, feeling myself shiver with fear – as Billy's blindness was senseless. That was it. It was as senseless, as empty of meaning, as Billy's blindness. I lay there and thought of Roosevelt being dead and Billy being blind, and finally I turned over and lay with my face on the pillow and felt myself crying. I cried a long time.

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker), Billy Merrit

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

In one of the low points of the book, Reuven receives word of Frank Delano Roosevelt's death, the horrors of the Holocaust, and his friend Billy's failed medical operation, all within a few days of each other. Reuven is overcome by the senseless tragedy of the world: there's so much pain and suffering around him.

Reuven's behavior in this scene indicates how compassionate he's become: he's genuinely moved by the pain of other people. At the same time, the scene represents a challenge to Reuven's faith in God--like so many religious people in the 40s and 50s, he questions how a just God could possibly allow so much tragedy to occur.

☞ “The world kills us,” he said quietly. “Ah, how the world kills us.” ... “The world drinks our blood,” Reb Saunders said. “How the world makes us suffer. It is the will of God. We must accept the will of God.”

Related Characters: Reb Isaac Saunders (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Reb Saunders responds to the senseless tragedy of the Holocaust. Saunders--just like Reuven--is nearly overcome with the magnitude of the tragedy. Six million innocent Jews have been murdered, simply because of their religion. Saunders--knowing full-well that an entire community is looking to him for guidance and reassurance--gives the only interpretation of the Holocaust that his faith allows him to give. He concludes that the Holocaust, while horrible, is a reflection of the will of God, and therefore must be accepted by the Jewish community.

Saunders' behavior reflects both the weakness and the strength of the Hasidic community. The way he accepts the facts of the Holocaust might seem rather weak-willed: instead of trying to overturn tragedy, he just acknowledges it. And yet Saunders also seems incredibly strong in this scene. Instead of savagely looking for vengeance upon the Nazis who committed such enormous crimes, he takes the high ground. All Jews in the world have to come to terms

with the Holocaust, sooner or later: because of his boundless love for God, Saunders is able to come to terms with tragedy and be a pillar of strength for his followers.

“I am not satisfied with it either, Reuven. We cannot wait for God. If there is an answer, we must make it ourselves.”

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker), Reuven Malter

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 191



Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Malter here gives Reuven his own interpretation of the Holocaust. Mr. Malter takes offense to the quiet, almost passive way that Reb Saunders accepts the tragedy of the Holocaust as "God's will." Whether or not the tragedy is God's will, Malter insists, Jews can't just wait around for God to make the tragedy better. Instead, they need to mobilize their ranks and find ways to care for Holocaust survivors, repairing the Jewish communities that were devastated by the Nazis. In short, where Saunders responds to tragedy with calm, arguably noble acceptance, Malter responds with action.

In a nutshell, Malter and Saunders's responses to the Holocaust sum up the differences between Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism, while also reminding us that the differences between types of Judaism have *always* reflected the differences in the ways human beings cope with pain. Hasidism accepts pain and moves past it, trusting that God will resolve all human problems in the end; Orthodoxy tries to remedy pain with concrete, real-world action.

“What followers of a genius *aren't* dogmatic, for heaven's sake? The Freudians have plenty to be dogmatic about. Freud was a genius.”

Related Characters: Danny Saunders (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis



In this passage, Danny Saunders gives us his interpretation of Freud and of the scientific method. Danny is a student of

the teachings of Sigmund Freud; he believes in Freud's model of the unconscious. While Danny wants to be a psychologist, like Freud, his relationship with Freud is almost religious in nature. When criticized by his college professors, Danny defends Freud to the point where he admits to being "dogmatic" in his respect for the man.

Danny's defense of Freud is both rather un-scientific and deeply Hasidic. The scientific method is based on constant questioning of the world—even of the people and theories one believes in. Danny rejects the premises of the scientific method here because he's always been taught to embrace what he believes in with his whole heart. As a Hasidic Jew, Danny's model for "truth" isn't science at all—it's the Torah. Thus, Danny has a hard time accepting that good science hinges on questioning truth at all times.

“It is beginning to happen everywhere in America. A religious renaissance some call it.”

Related Characters: David Malter (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 219



Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Mr. Malter explains to Reuven that the Jewish-American culture is rapidly changing. After the atrocities of the Holocaust, many non-observant Jews are turning back to their synagogues for guidance and comfort. Malter mentions his non-observant friends, who have unexpectedly donated large amounts of money to their temples. Throughout the country, Jews are uniting together in the face of tragedy.

Note that Mr. Malter doesn't necessarily claim that the changes in Jewish culture *are* a "religious renaissance"—he just suggests that they could be interpreted that way. Perhaps the changes Malter describes are cultural more than religious. While some non-observant Jews are rediscovering their faith in God, many more are turning back to their religious communities for reasons that have nothing to do with religious faith. A temple isn't just a place for Jews to worship God; it's a place for them to feel a sense of love and community. Following the atrocities of the Holocaust, Jews feel a need to rekindle their communities, recognizing that religion provides comfort and acceptance, not just faith.

“Poor Danny, I thought. Professor Appleman, with his experimental psychology, is torturing your mind. And your father, with his bizarre silence – which I still couldn’t understand, no matter how often I thought about it – is torturing your soul.”

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker), Danny Saunders, Professor Nathan Appleman, Reb Isaac Saunders

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Potok sums up the challenges that Danny faces as a Hasidic student of science. To Professor Appleman, his teacher, Danny's religious affiliation is interfering with his scientific studies: Danny is more focused on his subjects' souls than on their minds. By the same token, Danny's own father sees him as being overly *scientific*: Danny is focusing too much on psychology when he should be studying the Torah.

With great difficulty, Danny tries to balance his commitment to science and his commitment to Judaism. In doing so, however, he alienates both the scientific and the Jewish community. To Danny's father, he's overly invested in science; to Danny's college professors, however, he's allowed his Judaism to warp his scientific sense of the world.

Chapter 14 Quotes

“The death of six million Jews had finally been given meaning, he kept saying over and over again. It had happened. After two thousand years, it had finally happened. We were a people again, with our own land. We were a blessed generation. We had been give the opportunity to see the creation of the Jewish state.”

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker), David Malter

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

Following the events of the Holocaust, a schism breaks out in the Jewish community. There are some, like Reuven's

father, who see the Holocaust as paving the way for the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel. As Mr. Malter argues, Israel will give "meaning" to the meaningless tragedy of the Holocaust: it will finally give the Jews a homeland (the very thing they've been lacking for thousands of years).



It's characteristic of Mr. Malter's worldview that he manages to find a "silver lining" even in a tragedy as horrific as the Holocaust. Malter cannot allow himself to accept pain and suffering--he's always trying to take action to *reduce* pain. Here, for example, Malter tries to mobilize the Jews in his community to support the establishment of an Israeli state. (The sad part about the post-Holocaust Zionist movement, Potok acknowledges, is that it tore apart the Jewish community once again. Some of the Jews in the country believed in a Jewish state; others bitterly opposed it.)

Chapter 15 Quotes

“We had begun to communicate with our eyes, with nods of our heads, with gestures of our hands.”

Related Characters: Reuven Malter (speaker), Danny Saunders

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 255-256

Explanation and Analysis

After Danny and Reuven's fathers become rivals (one supports a Zionist state; the other doesn't), Danny and Reuven are forbidden to talk to one another. Even though Danny and Reuven obey their parents, they find ways to communicate with one another: smiles, gestures, nods, etc. Both boys realizes that it's possible to communicate without ever opening one's mouth. Moreover, silence need not be an expression of anger or severity--silence can communicate love and affection. Danny and Reuven don't talk to each other, but they make it clear that they're still friends.



The passage is important because it foreshadows arguably the most moving scene in the novel, when Danny's father shows that his silence was always intended as a sign of love, not cruelty or austerity. As a vital part of his coming-of-age, Reuven learns that silence can mean many things. On a more symbolic level, Reuven's embrace of silence teaches

him that a seemingly tragic or painful event can be blessing in disguise, and that the same event can be interpreted in many different ways.

Chapter 18 Quotes

“... words are cruel, words play tricks, they distort what is in the heart, they conceal the heart, the heart speaks through silence. One learns of the pain of others by suffering one’s own pain, he would say, by turning inside oneself, by finding one’s soul.”

Related Characters: Reb Isaac Saunders (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Reb Saunders tries to justify his actions to

Reuven. Saunders has spent Danny's entire life treating him with stony silence--instead of playing with Danny or talking to him, Saunders has essentially ignored him.

While it's easy to condemn Saunders's actions as cruel, Potok makes it clear that Saunders acts out of love for his child. Saunders wants Danny to grow up to be the best leader he can possibly be: Saunders has been taught that the best way to raise a religious leader is to be silent around him. Even though Saunders' silence causes Danny a great deal of pain and loneliness, Saunders' silence is even more painful to Saunders himself: Saunders is forced to turn off his natural fatherly instincts.

In the end, then, Potok is sympathetic to Saunders' behavior, even if he doesn't necessarily agree with it. To be a leader is to make sacrifices. Arguably Saunders' greatest sacrifice is his affection for his children. And yet by being silent around Danny, Saunders *is* expressing his love for his child: with every second of silence, Saunders proves his total confidence in Danny's abilities.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Reuven Malter, the novel's narrator and protagonist, mentions that for the first 15 years of his life he did not know Danny. They live close to each other in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, but Reuven is Orthodox and Danny is, like many of the residents in the area, Hasidic. Both he and Danny attend Jewish schools, Yeshivas, where they study the Talmud (book of Jewish law). Danny studies in a Yeshiva started by his father.

Reuven believes that he and Danny would never have met if it were not for America's involvement in the Second World War. Jewish parochial schools established sports teams to show that their students were physically fit and ready for war. Reuven is on his school's softball team, which is about to play the winning team of another neighborhood league.

Mr. Galanter, Reuven's coach, leads the team in a pre-game practice. Davey Cantor, a boy on Reuven's team, tells him that the team they are about to play is filled with "murderers." Reuven does not take him seriously.

The other team enters the field wearing traditional Orthodox Jewish clothing, and looking overall very un-athletic. Their coach is a rabbi and asks if they can practice on the field before the game. Mr. Galanter agrees, and the rabbi sits down and starts reading as his team practices. The Hasidic team makes clumsy mistakes as they practice and the players speak to each other in Yiddish. Reuven jokes with Davey that they don't look like murders, and Davey tells him to just wait for the boy practicing batting: Danny Saunders, Reb Saunders's son.

The Hasidic team is clumsy, but hits the ball very hard. One opposing batter hits the ball so hard that the line drive hurts Sidney Goldberg when he fields the ball. The batter who hit it races around the bases and, as he runs past second, knocks over Reuven in what appears to be an illegal move. The umpire calls the runner safe at third.

The mention of Danny in the first sentence indicates that he will be an important character to Reuven. The description of the setting that follows presents the area of Brooklyn as defined by Jewish faith and customs. That they have never interacted suggests the profound separation between their two communities different interpretations of Judaism.



By stating the reason for their meeting as WWII, Reuven indicates the great influence that the war has had and will have on these boys' lives. The need to start sports teams also hints at the rest of American society's belief in Jewish weakness.



Reuven's inability to accept Davey's warning shows his misunderstanding of Danny and the Hasidic team. Just as the rest of society perceives Jews as weak, Danny perceives the even more pious Hasidic players as weak



The Hasidic team's practice seems to support Reuven's interpretation of their skill. Yet Davey's persistence implies that there is some surprise to come. Davey brings up Danny, who was already introduced in the first line, showing that he will be important in this game as well as in the book as a whole. Danny is also introduced as the son of Reb Saunders: his definition is linked to his father.



The Hasidic team may not be skilled, but they are clearly rough. Their disregard of the rules and rough play implies that they are determined to win at any cost – they are driven by some higher cause.



Danny comes up to bat next and hits the ball on the third try straight at the pitcher's head. The pitcher, afraid it could have "killed him." Danny makes it to second base for a double. As the next batter comes up, Danny asks Reuven if his father is Mr. Malter, who writes about the Talmud. Danny then says that he told his team to "kill you apikorsim" (educated Jews who do not believe in God).

Reuven, like Danny, is now defined by his father. Danny, like Reuven, also proves himself to be the most skilled player on his team. He reveals to Reuven that he and his team intend to crush Reuven's team because they perceive any Jews who don't practice Judaism as Hasids do to be unbelievers, and therefore their higher cause for the game is religious.



The game becomes more brutal and Reuven thinks about what his father has told him about strict, Hasidic Jews like Danny Saunders: that they believe that they alone are chosen by God. He gets very angry and begins to feel like the game is a war.

Reuven now has a religious cause as well – to beat the Hasids as punishment for their insistence that only they are real Jews. The game has turned into a war, a battle for identity. Reuven's father is introduced as a source of knowledge.



Mr. Galanter advises his team to play carefully, and they do. Danny comes back to the plate and hits a high, hard ball that Reuven miraculously catches. Mr. Galanter tells him he deserves a Purple Heart.

Reuven and Danny are again connected through this strong hit and miraculous catch. Mr. Galanter reinforces Reuven's belief that this game is war.



As the game moves into the last inning, Reuven's team is leading five to three. Reuven takes over as pitcher. He strikes out the first batter, using his curveball, and then Danny comes to bat. He stares and grins at Reuven. After two strikes and two balls Danny anticipates Reuven's curveball and hits it hard straight at Reuven. The ball shatters Reuven's glasses and knocks him over.

This is Danny and Reuven's faceoff. Danny learns and comes to anticipate Reuven's pitching style, further linking the two boys. Danny's hit straight at Reuven implies that he really did want to "kill" him. Without choosing it, they have developed a connection through this violent game.



Mr. Galanter takes Reuven out of the game. Reuven is in great pain but sits on the bench as his team loses. He sits next to the Rabbi who looks at him once and turns away. Mr. Galanter comes over at the end of the game, looks at his face, and rushes him to the hospital.

The Hasidic rabbi's lack of care at Reuven's injury shows his disregard for the opposing team. The gravity and brutality of the game has ended only in pain. The team with an extreme religious mission has won.



CHAPTER 2

Reuven and Mr. Galanter go to the Brooklyn Memorial Hospital. Reuven's eye is feeling worse and he is shuttled from doctor to doctor. Mr. Galanter calls Reuven's father.

As Reuven moves through the hospital seeing many doctors it becomes clear that his injury is serious. Reuven's father is introduced as his caretaker.



Reuven has only been to the hospital once when he got his tonsils out and he is scared and nervous that his father will be frightened when he gets the call. An older doctor, Dr. Snyderman comes and once he realizes that Reuven was wearing glasses when he was hit he says that Reuven needs to go upstairs.

Reuven is put on a stretcher and thinks that the lights are changing colors in the elevator. He remembers Danny Saunders's grin and then sees a bright light over his head.

Reuven opens his eye and sees a nurse. His head feels better and he is hungry. Reuven meets the man in the bed next to him, Tony Savo, who is an ex-boxer. Reuven thinks about how much he hates Danny. He also meets a young blonde boy, Billy Merrit, and realizes that Billy is blind.

The nurse tells Reuven that he is in a kosher hospital, so he can eat. Reuven talks to Tony and introduces himself as Robert (instead of Reuven). Reuven also describes his appearance to Billy, who tells Reuven that he will be having a new operation to hopefully restore his sight. Billy became blind in a car accident that also killed his mother. His father was driving the car.

Mr. Malter comes in, looking unusually disheveled. Mr. Malter tells his son that he had an operation, has been asleep for a full day, and that there is a possibility that the scar tissue from his injury could grow over his eye and leave him partially blind. Mr. Malter also says that Reb Saunders called him to ask how Reuven was, and that Danny is very sorry for what happened.

Mr. Malter begins to cough and Reuven tells him he should take better care of himself, and adds that it's Danny's fault that Mr. Malter is sick. Reuven tells his father that Danny hit him deliberately, but Mr. Malter responds that he should not make such a claim if he is not sure it is true.

Mr. Malter has brought Reuven a radio so that Reuven can keep up with the news of the war even though Reuven is not allowed to read as he recovers from his surgery. Mr. Malter tells Reuven that it will be a week or two before he can read again.

Reuven cares deeply about his father, and even when in pain Reuven does not want to worry him.



Reuven's hallucinations demonstrate the fragility of sight. With a damaged eye Reuven loses touch with reality – because he believes what he sees. Danny's grin haunts Reuven even as he loses consciousness.



Reuven cannot forget Danny; he is obsessed. Reuven is now among different people. They are clearly not the Williamsburg Jews introduced in the first chapter.



Reuven Christianizes his name. He is aware of its strangeness to some other people. Billy is an innocent, kind and tragic figure who has not yet lost hope. He shows the possible consequence of eye injuries. The new operation was discovered in the war; disaster can bring innovation.



Reuven's natural healing processes could leave him blind. Mr. Malter tells this to his son because they have an open and trusting relationship. Danny is sorry for his brutality although he seemed unrepentant at the time.



Reuven is shown as a caretaker for his father's health. Mr. Malter is shown as thoughtful and open-minded, he teaches Reuven to look at all sides of a story and not make claims without evidence.



The war has been brought into the hospital. There is no way to avoid it, and Mr. Malter and Reuven are not trying to avoid it: they are deeply engaged in it.



Mr. Malter has also brought his son his tefillin and prayer book and tells him to pray. Mr. Malter leaves and Reuven sits in his bed and thinks about how he has taken his eyes and his health for granted. A nurse comes in and gives him a pill to go to sleep. Reuven falls asleep looking at Billy and thinking about what it would be like to be blind. He cannot even fully understand the possible reality of blindness.

God and prayer also cannot be avoided. In spite of Danny's accusation that they don't believe in God, Reuven and his father are both very religious. Reuven's thoughts about blindness show his fears for his own eyes, and his inability to fathom blindness is analogous to a contemplation of his own mortality.



CHAPTER 3

Reuven wakes to shouts and a blaring radio. He does not know what is going on, but knows it must be something major because people are always talking about the war, but never with such enthusiasm. The nurse, Mrs. Carpenter, tells everyone to get back to bed. Mr. Savo tells him that it is D-day and Allied forces are winning. Together they listen to news of the invasion on Reuven's new radio. Billy wants to listen too, and tells them that his uncle is a pilot.

The hospital is no escape from the war, but as they all celebrate Mrs. Carpenter serves as a reminder of their distance from the battlefield. Mr. Savo was too injured from boxing before the war to ever fight. Billy, although just a child, will never be like his uncle the pilot.



Reuven asks Mrs. Carpenter if he can pray with his tefillin (two boxes containing the Torah which are worn while praying). She allows it, and as Reuven painfully puts them on Mr. Savo asks Reuven if he plans to become a "priest or something." Reuven responds that he might but his father wants him to be a mathematician. Mr. Savo says the world needs priests, not fighters like himself. They listen on the radio as a correspondent excitedly describes that the Germans are sinking a Norwegian destroyer.

Reuven is clearly religious and contrasts this with his academic success. He begins to pray when he hears of the battle, implying that he is praying for the soldiers. The enthusiasm of the reporter shows the inescapable excitement of war – something Reuven was tied up in during his own small sports battle.



Reuven listens to the radio and talks about the war all morning. A small boy, Mickey, from another ward begs Mr. Savo to throw a ball with him and he eventually agrees. Mrs. Carpenter comes and scolds both of them. Mr. Galanter comes to visit Reuven. They speak about the war, and Reuven mentions that Billy's uncle is a pilot. Mr. Galanter looks uncomfortable and explains that he tried to make it as a soldier but could not. He leaves and Billy says his father could not fight because of the accident. There is no one else to take care of him and his sister.

Mrs. Carpenter's anger shows that Mr. Savo is so injured that he cannot even throw a ball. This is contrasted with Mr. Galanter's inability to explain his own absence from the war. Billy's father's personal tragedy has kept him from fighting. Among all the discussion of war, this section presents men who have avoided battle by choice, and those who have been forced to stay home.



Reuven falls asleep and has a nightmare about his eye. He wakes to see Danny standing by his bed. He is shocked. Danny apologizes and asks Reuven not to hate him. Reuven says "I don't hate you," and Danny sits down. Danny knows about the scar tissue. Reuven asks Danny how it feels to "know you've made someone blind in one eye." Danny keeps saying he is sorry but Reuven is still angry. Danny leaves. Reuven and Mr. Savo discuss Danny. Mr. Savo asks if he is one of "those real religious Jews," and calls them "fanatics."

Danny is trying to make amends but Reuven is not ready to. He is very frightened about his eye and this adds to his continued anger with Danny. Mr. Malter has talked to Danny, showing that he wants Danny and his son to make up. This section also provides a Savo's external, non-Jewish view of Hasidic Jews – they are labeled as fanatics from their clothing alone.



Mr. Malter comes to visit and is angry with Reuven for not allowing Danny to apologize. He reminds his son that the Talmud advocates forgiveness. Mr. Malter goes on to say that when someone comes to talk to you, you must “be patient and listen,” especially if they have hurt you. They then speak about the developing invasion in Europe, which Mr. Malter calls “the beginning of the end of Hitler.” Mr. Malter leaves and Reuven feels guilty for his treatment of Danny.

Billy’s father, Roger Merrit, comes to visit and asks Reuven to come visit them after Billy’s operation. Reuven agrees. The next morning Reuven is able to walk around. Reuven again spends the day listening to the radio, but becomes increasingly frustrated with not being able to read. Danny comes again; now Reuven apologizes for his behavior the day before. Danny tells Reuven that he wanted to kill him during the ball game. It wasn’t about the game but something specifically about Reuven that got to Danny.

Reuven is shocked by Danny’s lack of a Yiddish accent. They talk about their studies. Danny recites a passage from the Talmud and reveals that he has a photographic memory. Danny says he is going to take his father’s place as rabbi and Reuven says he wants to be a rabbi as well, which surprises Danny. He doesn’t understand why anyone would become a rabbi if they had the choice to do something else. Danny says he is interested in psychology. Reuven realizes that he did not try to duck when Danny hit the ball at him. Reuven did not want to appear cowardly.

Reuven forgives Danny and they discuss how Danny’s team was formed. Danny had to convince his father, Reb Saunders, to allow a sports team by saying that it was their duty to beat the “apikorsim” (Jews who don’t believe in God). Danny says that his father only speak to him when they are studying the Talmud. Reb Saunders wishes “everyone could talk in silence.” Danny becomes distant and leaves, promising to come the next day.

CHAPTER 4

Reuven’s father comes to visit him and he is sicker and weaker than before. He tells Reuven that Dr. Snyderman will look at his eye on Friday morning and he will most likely come home Friday afternoon. Reuven will not be able to read for 10 days and they will find out about the scar tissue after that.

Mr. Malter introduces two important lessons in the novel: forgiveness and listening. He bases these lessons on Jewish teachings. Reuven’s shift from anger to guilt shows that he is deeply influenced by his father. The quick mention of Hitler brings up further questions about the possibility of forgiveness.



Reuven is becoming frustrated with his injury, but not sad. Reuven has realized, based on his father’s advice, that his treatment of Danny was wrong and he is now ready to talk to him. Danny reveals some sort of violent connection that he feels with Reuven. This confirms that there has been some bond between them from the beginning.



Danny’s Hasidic attire is deceiving, and even Reuven has overestimated how different these strict Jews are from himself. Danny reveals that he has no choice in his life, and although he has other interests, seems resigned to his fate. In suddenly seeing Danny as a person, Reuven also realizes he can’t blame only Danny for his injury. Reuven, too, was being rigid—the ball hit him because he was refusing to look cowardly in front of Danny.



This passage introduces Danny’s complex relationship with his father. Although Danny clearly does not agree with everything his father believes, he has no choice but to follow his rules. This also presents the symbol of silence, and speaking in silence, which distracts and upsets Danny. Danny and Reuven discuss many deep aspects of their lives in this first conversation.



Mr. Malter’s worry for his son takes a physical toll on him. He has a delicate constitution and cares deeply for his son. Reuven will return home on Shabbat, appropriately, the day of rest.



Reuven tells his father about his conversation with Danny, and that he now likes his former enemy. Mr. Malter says that people are not always as they seem to be and he tells Reuven that he should make Danny his friend. He reminds his son that friendship is serious and important and that the Talmud says that one should “choose a friend.” Friendship is a commitment; it is different than just liking someone.

Reuven says that Danny does not seem like a Hasid and Mr. Malter agrees. Reuven also says that he has been praying from memory even though he can't read.

Reuven tells Mr. Savo that Mr. Malter teaches the Talmud to high school students. Mr. Savo warns Reuven that he shouldn't become friend with someone like Danny, who hit him. Reuven tries to tell Mr. Savo that it wasn't Danny's fault but Mr. Savo just states that he “doesn't like fanatics.”

Reuven wakes in the middle of the night and can't remember where he is. The curtain is drawn around Mr. Savo's bed and a nurse nervously tells Reuven to go back to bed. In the morning the curtain is still drawn. Billy and Reuven are nervous about Mr. Savo, and Reuven takes out his tefillin and prays for his health. Reuven remembers his eye examination is the next day and he becomes increasingly scared.

Danny comes to see Reuven again and they sit out in the hallway because of Mr. Savo. Danny talks again about his father's silence. He also talks about reading Darwin, Hemmingway, and the fact that he sometimes doesn't know what God wants. The whole time it seems as if he is talking to himself more than to Reuven. Reuven says he looks like a Hasid but does not act like one.

Danny describes that he has no choice but to take his father's place because the dynasty will fall apart if he does not. His family has been rabbis for six generations. He says that once he becomes a rabbi he can read whatever he wants, Danny then notes the irony in the fact that he does not want to be a rabbi but has to be, and Reuven doesn't have to be a rabbi but wants to be.

This passage indicates that friendship will be an important theme in the novel. Friendship is not just fun, it is a serious commitment, and an active choice: one must choose one's friends. In many ways it seems that Danny and Reuven met by fate, but they both had to choose to be friends, not enemies.



Danny does not fit the stereotype of a Hasid. Reuven is deeply religious himself and is more similar to Danny than he thought.



Mr. Savo presents a typical outsiders view. He holds Reuven's previous beliefs, and labels Danny a fanatic because of his clothing. Reuven is now totally pro-Danny; he has completely changed his view and now defends his friend to-be.



Mr. Savo's turn for the worse shows the fragility of his condition, and reminds Reuven of the uncertainty of his own health. Again, he turns to prayer during a time of difficulty.



Danny is eager to have someone with whom to share his thoughts. His father's silence means he has no one to talk to, so he needs a friend. Danny does not seem like a Hasid because he discusses literature he can't read, and questions God even though he has already committed himself to becoming a rabbi.



Here Danny addresses the theme of choice. He has resigned himself to his personally unhappy fate, because he feels that he has absolutely no choice. In contrast, Reuven is more free.



Mr. Malter walks in and Danny recognizes him. Reuven finds out that they know each other because Mr. Malter has been recommending books to Danny in the library. Mr. Malter has known all along but Danny had no idea. Mr. Malter says he never told either of them because he didn't believe it was his place to tell.

Mr. Malter has known about Danny's intellectual doubts and intelligence and knew that Reuven could be a good friend. They still chose to be friends, but Mr. Malter brought them together – acting as a father to both.



Mr. Malter is feeling sick, so after a brief talk with his son he returns home. Reuven keeps thinking about Danny and his father. The next morning he wakes up excited and nervous for his examination. Mr. Savo is feeling better now, and it becomes clear that his recent injury arose from throwing the ball to Mickey. Billy has left for his operation and Reuven spends the morning praying for him.

Reuven is nervous for his own health, while he sees such examples of illness in his new friends. Mr. Savo nearly died from the slightest effort, and Billy's chances of recovery seem slim. He turns to God in these moments of uncertainty.



Reuven goes to his examination and Dr. Snyderman seems tired. The doctor thinks he will be all right but wants to see him again to check on the scar tissue. Mr. Savo is happy that Reuven will be able to leave. Mr. Malter comes to pick up Reuven. As he is about to leave, Mr. Savo tells Reuven that his eye was taken out. He says he regrets being a fighter. He could have been in the war, and become a priest.

Reuven has escaped the hospital, but sees what could have been the alternative in Mr. Savo, who is filled with regret for choices he made when he was young, and who wishes he could have been a figure of peace and comfort rather than a fighter.



CHAPTER 5

Reuven and his father take a taxi back from the hospital and are greeted with an elaborate lunch by their housekeeper, Manya. After lunch Reuven walks around his home noting that he has lived here all his life but never really seen it. He describes each tiny detail: from the distance between the bookshelf and the window to the color of his bedspread.

Manya's presence emphasizes the fact that Reuven has no mother. Reuven's detailed description of his home shows that his suffering has heightened his awareness. There is much to see in a place if you choose to look.



On his walls Reuven notes pictures of famous Jewish figures, images of war maps and Franklin Delano Roosevelt cut out from the *New York Times* and Albert Einstein from *Junior Scholastic*.

The Malter's home shows the importance of Judaism, secular intellectualism, and current events—the war—on their lives.



Reuven walks through his father's room to get to the living room. Mr. Malter does not like to be disturbed while working, but Reuven walks through the dark, book-filled room quickly and notices all of a sudden that his father has not coughed once since they have come home.

Mr. Malter's dislike of being disturbed shows that work and study is taken very seriously in this home. Mr. Malter's health seems very closely connected to his son's; it was his worry for Reuven that made him sick.



Reuven sits in his living room and looks out the window “tasting” the sights and sounds of the world. Everything looks brighter and more alive after his time in the white hospital ward. He cannot believe that his injury was only five days ago because he feels like a changed man. He remembers that Danny is coming tomorrow and sits thinking about him for a long time.

Potok writes this section as if Reuven has just returned from war. He is a changed man who has left “pieces of [his] old self behind.” After Reuven realizes that he has changed he sits and thinks about Danny, showing that Danny has been a large part of Reuven’s transformation.



CHAPTER 6

The Malter sit down for Shabbat dinner and Reuven asks his father about Danny. Mr. Malter says he will have to go far back in Jewish history to explain. He asks if Reuven has the patience to sit and listen and Reuven says he does.

The introduction of this story links Danny to a longer line of Jewish history and tradition. Mr. Malter is also presented as a teacher and scholar, guiding Reuven through both complex personal and historical issues.



Mr. Malter describes the growth of Hasidism in Poland in the 18th Century. Jews were invited to come to Poland in the 13th Century when the country was poor, and although they had been persecuted elsewhere they prospered in Poland. In the 17th Century the Polish peasants revolted and killed around 100,000 Jews, decimating the Jewish Polish community.

The present reality of the Jewish people is connected to tragedies that occurred hundreds of years ago. This demonstrates how suffering is an unfortunately integral part of the Jewish faith. This discussion foreshadows the revelation of the Holocaust, which the American Jews do not yet know about.



Mr. Malter continues that it was hard to believe in God during this time of tragedy. The Polish Jews became a “degraded people.” Many Jews believed that this slaughter marked the coming of the Messiah. A man named Shabbtai Zvi claimed to be the Messiah, and more than half the Jewish world followed him. He was a fraud, though, which created a “spiritual disaster.” The Polish Jews became superstitious and uneducated. Jewish scholars only focused on Pilpul or empty arguments about tiny sections of the Talmud that do not relate to the world.

The fact that the Jews could not make it through this dual physical and spiritual tragedy affirms the fears that Mr. Malter will have about the future of the Jews after the Holocaust. He also points out that ignorance equals ruin. Mr. Malter repeatedly emphasizes the importance of thoughtfulness and education.



Mr. Malter pauses to asks his son if he is going on too long and Reuven tells him to continue. Mr. Malter explains that as the Jews became more and more superstitious and less educated. This is the point when the explanation of Reb Saunders’ son begins. A man named Israel was born in 1700. He was poor and uneducated and would leave school to spend time in nature.

Mr. Malter apologizes for going on for too long, showing that he cares greatly about his son. He wants to make sure that Reuven is listening and engaged. The answer to the question about Danny goes back to 1700, showing the importance of history in understanding Judaism, especial Hasidism.



Israel worked in a Synagogue but studied the Kabbalah (books of Jewish mysticism) rather than the Talmud. He became a teacher and was seen as a wise, holy man. He married the daughter of a rabbi, but his brother-in-law kicked him out and he and his wife moved out into the mountains. He became known as the Ba'al Shem Tov (The Kind or Good Master of the Name) and gave birth to Hasidism. He traveled around and argued for an open form of religion. He provided the people with a new way to understand and approach God.

Each Hasidic community had a tzaddik, or a leader, and the people followed these leaders blindly. Many of them became corrupt, but others were sincere. The Hasidim also became frozen in time. They wear the same clothes they work in Poland in the 1700s, and they hold the same customs and beliefs, they are not allowed to read secular literature. Reb Saunders is a great tzaddic and Talmudist and when he dies the position will go on to Danny.

Mr. Malter tells another story that he says relates to Danny. A brilliant man named Soloman who lived in the 18th century abandoned his family to study philosophy in Berlin and died alone. Danny may be even smarter than Soloman, and he lives in a free country so he is able to get any book he wants. Mr. Malter says that Danny has a mind that only comes around "once in a generation."

Mr. Malter tells Reuven that Danny needs a friend. He is lonely and confused over whether he should follow his mind or his father. He says that the accident has bound them, and that Danny can help Reuven as well. Both boys need this friendship.

Reuven says he can't believe that so much has changed in one week and tells his father about everything he noticed when he came home from the hospital. Mr. Malter says he wishes Reuven's mother were alive but doesn't finish the thought. Reuven goes to bed and Mr. Malter stays downstairs, thinking and drinking tea.

CHAPTER 7

Reuven and his father go to their storefront synagogue together in the morning, which is filled with yeshiva teachers like Mr. Malter. During the blessing Reuven thinks about Mr. Savo and Billy and whether he would be able to say a blessing if he had been blinded. They come back and have lunch and Reuven takes a nap.

The Hasidic religion came out of a rejection of tradition and the current order of society. He also points out that there are many different forms of Judaism, Hasidism was the right new form at the right time.



This section explains the risk that Danny is taking by reading different novels and even Freud. Not only is he violating his faith, he is also the very person who is supposed to uphold it by following in his father's footsteps. He has no choice with his future.



Through the story of Soloman, Mr. Malter points out that Danny's brilliance can lead to loneliness and dissatisfaction. He has a gifted mind, not something that one can choose to cultivate. He says that Danny is free in America, but he is only partially free. He still has the laws of his father and his faith.



Mr. Malter explains one of the values of friendship. It gives people a new perspective on their lives and the opportunity to share. Mr. Malter's interpretation of the accident shows that they were destined to be friends.



This confirms that Reuven has in fact changed after his accident and his time in the hospital. Mr. Malter's unfinished thought is also one of two mentions of Reuven's mother in the novel. She does not fit in to this story of fathers and sons.



This passage again questions how it is possible to thank God during times of suffering. Reuven's own experience of tragedy is through Mr. Savo and Billy so he thinks of them in such circumstances. This foreshadows later discussions of the Holocaust.



When he wakes Danny is standing over him and asks Reuven to come over and meet his father, who has to “approve of his friends.” On the walk over Reuven says that he has no siblings because his mother died after he was born. Danny has a brother and a sister. Danny tells the story of how his father saved his Russian community from anti-Semitic attacks during World War I. His saw his first wife and child killed and brought his community to America

After hearing a history of the Hasidism last night, Reuven is now hearing the history of Danny’s personal experience. Reb Saunders has been through a very similar tragedy to early Polish Jews, which helps explain some of his strongly held ideas.



They come to a block filled with robed Hasidim and the line parts “like the red sea” as Danny leads Reuven through. They go into the synagogue, which is the same size and layout at Reuven’s house. Reuven feels like “a cowboy surrounded by Indians.” Everyone is speaking Yiddish. Two old men come up to Danny and ask him to settle a dispute they have over a passage in the Talmud.

This scene finally shows Danny’s power in this community. He is treated like royalty just for being Reb Saunders’ son. This demonstrates Danny’s lack of choice because he is already seen as a leader.



Reb Saunders walks in and everyone stops speaking. Danny’s brother, a young, pale boy, holds on to his father’s robes. Reb Saunders briefly speaks with Reuven (“almost like an accusation”) about his eye, his studies, and his father. He says that they will talk more later and then the service begins.

Reb Saunders, as a tzaddic, has complete control over his congregation. Reb Saunders’s questions are normal but his tone demonstrates that he is vetting his son’s friends. He also has a serious view of friendship, although his qualifications are stricter than Mr. Malter’s.



The room fills with more men and they all begin to eat a meal. Reb Saunders stares at Reuven and Danny eats in complete silence. Someone begins to sing a prayer and everyone joins in. The singing continues and Reuven joins in, swaying and clapping and even enjoying himself. The singing stops abruptly and everyone starts to pray. As everyone turns to look at Reb Saunders, Danny prepares himself “as a soldier does before he jumps ... into open combat.”

Reuven gets swept up in the enthusiasm of the service. Just as he starts to feel a part of the community, and to understand their fervor, the moment ends. Reuven feels the tension growing and he witnesses the battle that Danny must undergo each day to prove himself to his father.



Reb Saunders begins to speak in a chanting voice, swaying back and forth as everyone leans forward to pay attention. Danny is looking down at his plate and looks up every once in a while at his father. Reb Saunders uses a gemtraya (interpreting works in Hebrew by giving them number equivalents), which his followers greatly enjoy. His sermon argues that without the Torah people are nothing. The world is contaminated without the Torah. Reuven privately disagrees, thinking that Einstein, FDR and the soldiers fighting Hitler are part of the world.

This passage shows both Reb Saunders’ command over his followers and his strict, exclusive view of the world. He sees the world as black and white: God and Judaism is good, and everything else is bad. Reuven, with his father’s influence, believes that there is also good in the secular, intellectual world, and that people can do good deeds (ex: soldiers) without being Jewish.



Reb Saunders finishes and everyone stares at Danny. Reb Saunders asks Danny if he heard any mistakes. Danny points out his father's error. Reuven realizes that Reb Saunders is testing his son and that this must happen every Sabbath. Reb Saunders then asks Reuven if he heard any mistakes and Reuven very nervously points out an error in his gemitraya. Reuven thinks "what a ridiculous way to gain admiration and friendship!"

Reb Saunders is testing both his son and his son's friend. This implies that his evaluation of people is based solely on their knowledge of and thoughtfulness in regard to Jewish law. This is how he determines whether he "approves" of Danny's friends.



Reb Saunders speaks with Reuven and tells him that Mr. Malter is a great scholar. He tells Reuven that it is not easy to truly be a friend." He asks Reuven to come again and now seems friendly and warm.

Reb Saunders and Mr. Malter respect each other although they have different views and both believe that being a friend comes with responsibilities – although neither is specific about what these are.



Danny and Reuven walk home together and talk about the test. Danny says that Reb Saunders' followers love it. Reuven and Danny are happy to realize that they plan to attend the same Jewish college.

The test is not to teach Danny, but also to prove to the followers that Danny will be ready to take his fathers' position.



Reuven comes home late and Mr. Malter is waiting up, worried that his son has been out so late. They discuss Reb Saunders. Mr. Malter says that this testing is not terrible, it is part of a long tradition. He says that Reb Saunders is a great man and if he were not a tzaddic he could do great things for the world.

Mr., Malter argues that there are aspects of religion that keep you from helping the world. This will become important when Mr. Malter and Reb Saunders disagree over their responses to the Holocaust.



CHAPTER 8

Reuven returns to school where everyone thinks he is a hero because of the softball game. The game feels very far away to Reuven. He goes to see Danny at the library after school and finds him reading in the back of the third floor, where Reuven has never been before.

Reuven has changed since his injury, which was indicated first in his new observations of his home and now again in the new way he interacts with his friends. Danny has hidden himself in the library because he has to hide his secular reading from his father.



Danny is reading remarkably quickly and doesn't notice Reuven at first. Because Reuven can't read yet with his injured eye he closes his eyes and thinks about mathematical logic. Danny comes over and tells him he has been reading Graetz's History of the Jews. He is disturbed that Graetz writes that Hasidic tzaddics became greedy, "vulgar and disgusting." Reuven tells Danny that he should speak with Mr. Malter about it before he takes the history too seriously.

Danny is disturbed by his history and is reading about it because he is conflicted about his own faith and future as a Hasidic leader. Reuven's reaction shows what he has learned from his father and also that Jewish history is very complex. He recognizes that there are different people with different ideas, and sometimes people have extreme ideas that are not entirely accurate.



Danny starts speaking about the concept of the unconscious, which he has been reading about in philosophy books. Danny is fascinated by the idea that people have an unknown inner self. Danny has been teaching himself German so he can read Freud to learn more about these concepts.

Danny reveals his secular interest in philosophy, which will become even more important as the book proceeds. He is fascinated by the soul as more than a religious concept.



As they are leaving the library Danny looks around to make sure that no one he knows has seen him there. When Reuven gets home he tells his father that Danny has been studying German in order to read Freud. Mr. Malter is surprised but says that there will be no way to stop Danny. Reuven asks about Graetz's history of the Jews and Mr. Malter says that Graetz was biased and exaggerated their faults.

*Mr. Malter knows that Danny's intellectual curiosity is insatiable. He also repeats that Jewish history is complex and that the issues with Hasidism are not as obvious as Graetz implies. In comparison, in *The Chosen*, Potok depicts a nuanced view of the various forms of the Jewish faith.*



Mr. Malter feels guilty that he has been telling Danny what to read behind Reb Saunders's back. But he believes that Danny would have continued to read on his own anyway, and it is good to have direction from an adult. Mr. Malter says that Reb Saunders will find out one day and it will be a difficult situation.

Mr. Malter does not want to interfere with Reb Saunders as a father. He knows that he has acted as a father figure to Danny, and that Danny needs some substitute in addition to his distant father.



Reuven goes over to Danny's house of Shabbat to study the Talmud with Reb Saunders. Reuven meets Danny's kind mother and his pretty sister. Reb Saunders tells Reuven that he now knows that he is a good mathematician and now they will see about "more important things."

Reuven sees the warm familial side of the Saunderses: the largely unmentioned women. Reb Saunders is about to test Reuven again, he needs to further vet Reuven as Danny's friend in terms of his religious knowledge.



This discussion is different from what happened in front of the congregation – now Danny and his father are truly battling. They speak quickly and passionately and Reuven sits and listens. Although he is overwhelmed at first, Reuven comes to realize that Danny may beat him on breadth of knowledge but that he is Danny's equal in depth.

Reuven realizes that in many ways he is Danny's intellectual equal – another reason that they can be close friends. Reb Saunders has taught his son to care deeply, or at least fight passionately, about detailed points of Judaism.



Now Reuven feels he can contribute. He enters the "field of combat," making a point in support of Danny. The Saunders seem unsurprised that he is finally contributing.

By joining the conversation Reuven has passed Reb Saunders's test. He can participate in what Reb Saunders sees as the most important part of life.



The argument comes to an end and Reb Saunders sends Danny to get some tea. Reb Saunders tells Reuven that he has “a good head.” He then says that he knows that Danny has been going to the library and reading secular books. He says that his son is his “most precious possession” and he wants to know what he is reading but cannot ask him. Reuven is nervous but tells Reb Saunders everything that Danny is reading, and that Mr. Malter has been suggesting books. He leaves out the fact that Danny has been learning German to read Freud. Reb Saunders laments that his son is so brilliant.

Reb Saunders shows that he really does understand his son in spite of his distance. Although he greatly respects knowledge, Danny’s brilliance scares him. It shows that he understands that Danny’s intellectual curiosity could bring him away from his role as tzaddic. Leaving out Freud shows that this will become a problematic interest of Danny’s later in the novel.



Danny comes back and the three continue to discuss the Torah. As they are walking home Reuven tells Danny about what happened and, to Reuven’s surprise, Danny is relieved. Danny tells Reuven that his father as brought him up in silence. They only speak when they are studying the Torah. Reuven tells Danny that he should try talking to his father and Danny insists that he can’t.

Danny’s frustration with Reuven’s inability to understand his father’s silence shows that he has accepted it in some way. He does not understand it but he believes that his father is doing it for a reason and this will never change.



Reuven tells his father about everything that happened, including the Saunders family silent treatment. Mr. Malter tells Reuven that he has heard about this before but won't say anything more. Mr. Malter tells Reuven that Reb Saunders has talked to Danny through Reuven. He says that Reuven is in a difficult position.

Mr. Malter also understands something about Reb Saunders’s silence. He believes that fathers should be able to choose how to bring up their sons. He points out that one of Reuven’s roles as a friend may be as a form of communication between the Saunderses.



CHAPTER 9

Reuven goes back to Dr. Snyderman who tells him that his eyes have healed well and he will be able to read again. Reuven and his father are both so happy and in spite of all the catching up he has to do he enjoys doing his school work and taking exams again.

The chapter starts with Reuven’s own good luck and presents a stark contrast to the events to come.



Reuven is very busy with schoolwork and not able to see Danny. They talk on the phone and Danny says he will spend his summer studying the Talmud as he always does. He finishes his exams and is confident that he did very well.

The pace of the novel increases as Reuven’s life becomes busier. His everyday life interferes with his friendship. Danny’s entire life is filled with studying the Talmud.



Reuven calls Mr. Merrit, Billy’s father, to see how the operation went. Mr. Merrit tells Reuven that it was not successful. Reuven wants to come over and see Billy but they are moving to Albany.

Reuven has his first real encounter with injustice. He had good luck and Billy bad, and there is no good reason for one rather than the other.



Reuven is very disturbed by the news and can't concentrate on anything. He wanders through the house and ends up on the porch. Here he sees a fly trapped in a spider web, struggling to get out. The spider moves towards the fly and Reuven frees the fly from the web.

Reuven sees this bad luck replicated in the natural world. He has to wrestle with the fact that there are senseless wrongs in the world in spite of his belief in God. This foreshadows the senseless violence of the Holocaust.



CHAPTER 10

Danny and Reuven spend time together every day once school ends. Danny studies Talmud every morning, and Reuven spends three days studying and three days playing baseball. Reuven and his father study very slowly (unlike the Saunders) and very carefully.

Danny's life is unchanging: the summer months involve the same study as the school year. Reuven's life is more balanced. Here we are also introduced to Mr. Malter's form of studying Talmud, which will become important later.



Reuven goes over to the Saunders every Shabbat to discuss the Talmud with Danny and his father. Reb Saunders doesn't talk about Danny's secular reading anymore but he is clearly bothered by it.

Reb Saunders is worried about his son's reading, but he knows that there is nothing he can do about it at the moment. He understands how important it is to Danny.



The Malters closely follow the progress of the war, covering their home with more *New York Times* maps. Although most of the news is good the war seems to be moving slowly.

Although we haven't been hearing about it as much, the war is still an important part of the Malter's lives.



Danny is struggling through Freud. Although he has basically learned German, Freud uses very complex terms that he cannot decipher even with a dictionary by his side. Yet Danny still believes that Freud is a genius and he needs to read him. He is in a bad mood for their Shabbat Talmud studying. All of a sudden Danny takes a deep breath and looks excited. Later Danny tells Reuven that he has realized how to read Freud: he needs to be studied like the Talmud along with commentary.

Danny is using the very skills that his father taught him to read a text that criticizes religion. Reb Saunders, however, would say reading Freud like a religious text is sacrilegious to begin with. This shows that Danny is falling deeper into his secular passions, and it will be increasingly difficult to reconcile his issues and differences with his father and his fate.



Reuven leaves for the Catskills for a month with his father and Danny has started to make slow but steady progress with Freud. The narrative skips the Malter trip and starts again after Labor Day.

The pace of the narrative keeps speeding up as the boys become older. Potok skips the Catskills because it has nothing to do with the friendship between Danny and Reuven.



When Reuven gets back he sees Danny who looks older, has read more Freud and wants to talk with Reuven about it. Reuven says he will but school starts soon after and never gets around to discussing, or even thinking, about Freud.

Reuven doesn't have time for Danny when school starts. They both have their separate busy lives and get wrapped up in their daily activities and responsibilities.



CHAPTER 11

Reuven gets elected president of his class and this, along with his schoolwork, means that he is rarely able to see Danny. The war is accelerating and Reuven and his father listen to news of the Battle of the Bulge. Danny calls Reuven and says he wants to talk. Reuven says he is very busy and Danny says that it can wait.

The Allied forces are advancing on the Germans and everyone is very excited that the war will end soon. Danny catches the flu and then bronchitis and Reuven is not allowed to see him.

The next week they find out that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt has died and Reuven is utterly shocked. People are weeping on the street, and Reuven realizes that he never really thought of FDR as mortal. Mr. Malter talks to his son about what great things FDR did during the Depression. Reuven feels like this is a senseless tragedy akin to Billy's blindness.

Danny gets better but then Reuven catches the flu. When he gets better he has missed so much school that he has no time to see Danny. Then Reb Saunders and Mr. Malter become ill.

In May the news comes out that the war has ended and everyone is overjoyed. But only a few days later they start hearing about the German concentration camps—about the Holocaust of the Jews. As he is reading Mr. Malter breaks down in tears and cries “like a child.” Reuven can’t comprehend how six million Jews could have been murdered – how six million people of any kind could be murdered.

Reuven goes to Danny’s for Shabbat and Reb Saunders does not make them study Talmud. Instead they discuss the Holocaust and Reb Saunders’s youth in Russia. He cannot understand how God could have allowed this genocide to happen, but he says that it must be God’s will, and we must accept it.

Mr. Malter told Reuven in the beginning of the novel that being a friend is difficult and requires responsibility, but Reuven is now too wrapped up in his own business and the excitement of the war to be there for his friend.



Here Potok sets up a pattern that will be continued in the chapter: good news followed by bad, excitement followed by tragedy.



Reuven encounters more senseless tragedy in his life. He cannot understand how FDR could die just as the war is coming to an end. It seems cruel and absurd to Reuven, like Billy’s blindness.



Potok creates a chaotic structure for the chapter with one person falling sick after another as life changing news comes in.



Here is the real senseless tragedy—the Holocaust. All of the previous tragedies seem like they were building to this horrific tragedy, asking in small ways the tremendous questions that the Holocaust forces Jews to ask about God and evil in the world. Again, Reuven encounters tragedy that he cannot understand and for once his father cannot help him through it because he is too devastated and confused himself.



Reb Saunders shows the conservative orthodox interpretation of suffering, that everything is God’s will and that his people must just wait for the Messiah. Ultimately the Hasids believes that we have no choice besides following God’s laws and maintaining faith.



Reuven tells his father that Reb Saunders believes the Holocaust is ultimately God's will. Mr. Malter disagrees and says that they cannot wait for God, they need to make an answer for themselves. He says that the European Jewry has been destroyed and it is the responsibility of American Jews to rebuild their culture and lead their people.

Soon after this conversation, Mr. Malter has a heart attack. Reuven is in a "blind panic." Manya takes care of him at first but then Reb Saunders offers to take Reuven in. Reuven moves in to Danny's room.

CHAPTER 12

Reuven is treated like family in the Saunders home. The mother heaps food on his plate and the sister teases him. Levi, Danny's brother, is sickly and wanders "ghostlike" around the house. Danny and Reuven now spend all their time together, and finally have time to discuss Freud. They visit Mr. Malter at the hospital, spend time with Danny's mother and sister, and read together.

Danny and Reuven argue over the Talmud when Reb Saunders is free but he is almost never free because people are always coming to see him. He is very distant and on one occasion starts weeping at the table. He still never speaks with Danny unless they are talking about the Talmud.

Danny has gotten deep into Freud, whose writings upset him, but he cannot stop reading because he believes the Freud has great "insight into the nature of man." Danny notes that Freud's knowledgeable opinion of man is also very antireligious and negative.

Danny now understands and reads Freud with ease and begins teaching some of it the Reuven. Reuven begins to wonder how Danny can believe in the tenets of the Talmud and of Freud at the same time – it seems that one or other should win. Danny ignores Reuven.

Reuven does not talk to his father about Danny because he does not want to worry him while he is in the hospital. Mr. Malter has become obsessed with the plight of European Jews. He is very sick and weak and talks of nothing else but building a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He says that they cannot wait for the Messiah.

Mr. Malter represents the opposite opinion from Saunders. He cannot wait, but must take action to help his people. He believes people must act in the world, and not just wait for God. The Malter's and Saunders's different opinions on suffering will clash later in the novel.



Again Mr. Malter's physical health seems connected to his emotional and mental state. Potok shows how the war directly and personally affects his characters. It is not simply a temporal setting for the story.



Danny's family is like any other outside of his father. Danny and Reuven now have time to spend together and will be able to catch up on all that they have recently missed.



Reb Saunders is busy because his people are upset and confused by the Holocaust and turn to him. Like Mr. Malter, he weeps because of the pain and horror of the Holocaust.



Danny is becoming more and more interested in secular and even sacrilegious topics. He believes that there is more to know about man than only his relationship to God.



Danny's secular readings truly conflict with his religious study, as Reb Saunders worried they would.



Mr. Malter believes that the Jews must take action against what has been done to them. His reaction to suffering is to take action, which greatly differs to Reb Saunders's perspective.



Reuven mentions the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine (also known as Zionism) to Reb Saunders, not mentioning that his father supports it. Reb Saunders explodes with anger and says that it is sacrilegious for a Jewish homeland to be made before the coming of the Messiah – especially by secular Jews.

Reb Saunders believes that sufferings is the will of God and that any action taken to create a Jewish homeland before the coming of Messiah is wrong—is questioning God. He and Mr. Malter have opposite arguments.



Reuven is shocked by Reb Saunders's rage. Reb Saunders keeps repeating, "should we just forget the Messiah?" He says true Jews could not believe in Zionism.

Reb Saunders implies that Mr. Malter is not a true Jew, foreshadowing problems between the two families.



Danny explains to Reuven that a secular Jewish state is a violation of everything his father believes in, and that Reuven should never mention it again. Danny says that if Reb Saunders knew that Reuven's father believed in Zionism he would kick Reuven out of the house.

Although Reb Saunders approves of Reuven, Zionism is a deal breaker. He will not accept someone who believes in Zionism.



Danny talks about his brother, Levi. He is worried about his brother's sickness because he realized recently that his brother could continue the dynasty and become a tzaddic if Danny decided to study psychology. Danny says he hasn't told his father this yet, but he will need Reuven when he does.

The fact that Danny considers his brother as a possible candidate to take his position shows that he is seriously searching for a way out. He wants to choose his own life path and is trying to figure out how he can.



Reuven tries to talk about Danny's sister but Danny won't. He says that his sister was promised to be married when she was two years old. Danny says that he pities his father because he is a great man but is intellectually trapped. Danny believes that he is trapped as well.

Danny sees how he could also be intellectually trapped if he followed in his father's footsteps.



Reuven goes to the summer cottage with his father and, while there, the United States bombs Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the war in Japan ends. In September, Reuven and Danny both start at Hirsch College. Danny now wears glasses.

Danny and Reuven are growing older and are about to enter a new stage in their lives. That Danny now wears glasses shows that he is entering a new stage in an effort to see and understand the world around him.



CHAPTER 13

Danny and Reuven begin Hirsch Seminary and College, an Orthodox Jewish college that combines both religious and secular study. Danny is in the highest Talmud class with Rav Gershenson and Reuven is in the second highest. Danny is also studying psychology, but to his dismay at Hirsch this means experimental psychology. The chair of the department, Professor Appleman, dislikes psychoanalysis and Freud. Danny thinks that the test they are doing with rats and mazes have nothing to do with the mind.

Danny is encountering a new way of learning in college. Although he believed that psychology was a way of moving away from his tradition, he still studies it in a highly traditional manner, using the interpretive skills his father taught him. He knows nothing of the scientific method and this shows that in spite of his intellectual rebellion he is still deeply influenced by tradition.



Danny becomes the “talk of the Talmud Department” and the unwilling leader of the Hasidic students at the school. He is not doing as well in psychology and gets a B his first semester because he messed up math equations on the exam.

Danny is encountering his first difficulty with school and like always his religious studies are no problem at all. He may be more qualified to be a rabbi but he still follows his more risky choice.



Appleman thinks that the followers of Freud are dogmatic. Danny thinks that Freud is a genius, so of course they follow his teachings dogmatically. Reuven then compares Freud to a tzaddic. Reuven says that Danny should wait it out and have a talk with Prof. Appleman.

This demonstrates that the way Danny has been studying psychology is similar to his religious upbringing. Reuven believes in the power of communication, and urges Danny to talk to Appleman.



Reuven goes inside to see his father, who has a bad cold—his third in five months. It is also unusual for him to be home because most nights he is out working on Zionist activities. He has been taking his work and his teaching very seriously and never regained the weight he lost in the hospital after his heart attack.

Mr. Malter is working himself to exhaustion. We have seen before that his health is largely connected to his emotional state and he is overwhelmed by his Zionist activities.



Reuven tells his father that he wishes he would take it a little easy. Mr. Malter responds that it is not the time to take things easy when so much is going on in Palestine. He goes on to tell Reuven about the Jewish terrorist group, the Irgun, and the British resistance to their activities. Mr. Malter dislikes both the terrorists and the British non-immigration policy.

Mr. Malter shows that he cannot rest because of what is going on in Palestine. He has become obsessed with this issue and cannot think of anything else. In a way, he is trying to save the Jews, just as Reb Saunders worked to save his community in Poland.



Mr. Malter tells Reuven that “man must fill his life with meaning.” Mr. Malter says that he is working so hard because he wants to fill his life with meaning so he will eventually be worthy of rest. This worries Reuven and Mr. Malter apologizes for having been too blunt, and assures his son that he will live a long life. Reuven makes his father promise to go for a doctor's check up.

Mr. Malter has become almost fanatical about a Jewish state. He speaks about it as if it were a religious cause, because it is to him. It is something that will give meaning to his life.



To change the subject, Mr. Malter tells Reuven that Jack Rose, a non-observant Jew that Mr. Malter has known since he was a child, gave a \$1000 contribution to their synagogue. Jack Rose joined not for himself, but so that his grandchildren would have a good synagogue to attend. Mr. Malter says that this is part of a Jewish religious renaissance in America.

Mr. Malter shows how the Jewish community is changing. Jews in American understand that it is their responsibility to uphold the Jewish faith after the Holocaust. Being religious doesn't matter – it is an understanding of Jews as a race.



In line with this conversation, Reuven tells his father that he is definitely going to become a rabbi. Mr. Malter says that Reuven would have made a great professor, but if Reuven has truly decided then Mr. Malter supports his choice.

Mr. Malter accepts whatever choice Reuven wants to make. In spite of his almost fanatical beliefs, Mr. Malter is still open minded about his son, especially as opposed to Reb Saunders.



The next day Reuven goes to the library to read about experimental psychology. He sees how Danny must be very frustrated with it, because it focused on psychology from a physiological standpoint and has very little to do with psychoanalysis. Yet Reuven does see value in it. He sees how a science of psychology would need proof from laboratory findings. Reuven pities Danny because Appleman's experimental psychology is torturing his mind while his father's silence is torturing his soul.

Danny follows Reuven's advice and speaks with Appleman, and tells Reuven that he now realizes that he is a "very fine person." Appleman knows Freud through and through, and respects him, but says that experimental psychology would be a healthy balance for Danny. He also said that Danny should find a friend to help him with math on a regular basis. Reuven agrees, but when he jokingly calls himself Danny's tzaddic, Danny does not find it funny.

The tutoring with Danny is going well. Mr. Malter now speaks of nothing but Zionism and the education of American Jews. Hirsch College is also obsessed with the issue, but more divided. There were many "shades of Zionist thought" but the greatest division was between those who supported a Jewish state in Palestine, and the severely Orthodox, like Reb Saunders, who were vehemently against it. All of the students begin joining different groups, and tension is so high that fist-fights break out in the lunchroom. Danny keeps himself out of it.

Mr. Malter is preparing for a Zionist rally at Madison Square Garden. In his speech he says that only by creating a Zionist state will the deaths of 6 million Jews begin to make some sense, only then could Jews bring light to the world again. There was a huge snow storm the day before the rally and Reuven couldn't attend because of schoolwork.

Reuven waits up all night for his father. Mr. Malter comes home a bit before one am, telling Reuven that the rally has been a huge success. The rally makes the front page of the *New York Times* the next day. Reuven is so caught up with all the excitement that he doesn't notice that Danny did not have lunch with him as he typically does.

Reuven is more in line with a modern way of thinking. He understands the value of scientific study. Reuven links Danny's troubles at school to his familial problems because he knows that Danny is no longer able to achieve satisfaction in any area of his life. He used to have his reading as an escape. Reuven shows how much he has come to understand Danny.



Again open and honest conversation proves valuable. Danny learns that Appleman is a smart and kind man. Danny needs Reuven in a very concrete way. At the same time, Danny is still rigid: Reuven learns that he cannot joke with Danny about his religion – he is too self-conscious about it and takes it too seriously.



Zionism has become the most important topic of conversation and it is a heated discussion that shows two ways of thinking about the Jewish response to the Holocaust. Mr. Malter views of personal responsibility vs. Reb Saunders's ideas about waiting for God have divided the whole school. The Malter and Saunders views are representative of the ideas Jewish people as a whole at this time.



Mr. Malter sees a Jewish state as a way to respond to the Holocaust. This is how, as he told Reuven before, he wants to make meaning in his life. He wants to help Jews recover by giving them their own home after they have been chased out of so many other places.



The Zionist cause is very popular in New York. Reb Saunders is fighting a losing fight. Reuven's failure to realize that Danny is avoiding him shows that he does not understand the extent of Reb Saunders' hatred for Zionism—Reuven doesn't think about the consequences on his friendship.



The next day, Danny indicates to Reuven that he should follow him into the bathroom. There, Danny tells him that his father read about Mr. Malter's Zionist rally in the Yiddish newspaper and that Danny was no longer allowed to talk to or see Reuven. If Danny does see Reuven Reb Saunders will force Danny into an out-of-town rabbinic school with no secular education, forcing him to give up his study of psychology. A Hasid comes into the bathroom and Danny moves away from Reuven and then leaves without looking at him.

Reuven feels angry and sad. He notices that all of the Hasidic students avoid all contact with him. He is angry with "Reb Saunders' **blindness**" and frustrated "at Danny's helplessness." Reuven talks to his father about this and his father explains that Reb Saunders had to do this to because of his congregation. How could he tell them that his son was friends with a Zionist leader?

Reuven calls Reb Saunders a fanatic and Mr. Malter responds that "the fanaticism of men like Reb Saunders has kept us alive for two thousand years of exile." He goes on to say that we would have a Jewish state if the Jews in Palestine had the same fanaticism. Reuven can't fall asleep and lays awake thinking of everything he and Danny had done since his ball struck Reuven's **eye**.

CHAPTER 14

Danny and Reuven don't speak to each other for the rest of the semester. The silence hurts Reuven so much that it starts to affect his grades. He feels a "**blind**, raging fury" towards Reb Saunders. Reb Saunders starts staging anti-Zionist rallies, which are not successful. School becomes increasingly tense, and fist fights keep breaking out over Zionism in the lunchroom.

More news of violence comes from Palestine and Mr. Malter becomes increasingly passionate. He becomes even more involved in Zionist activities and Reuven rarely sees his father. Reuven thinks about Danny and Reb Saunders constantly and cannot understand how Danny can respect him.

In September, Reuven is seated near Danny during the school's opening assembly and Danny looks thin and pale. He does not even acknowledge Reuven and appears almost **blind**, which makes Reuven very angry. Reuven tries to forget Danny but cannot, especially because they are now both in Rav Gershenson's Talmud class.

This is the height of the conflict between tradition and modernity in the novel. Reb Saunders has shown that he likes and trusts Reuven but his passionate hatred for Zionism blinds him. He also proves that he knows how important a secular education is to Danny. Danny must choose his family and education over his friendship.



The symbol of blindness shows that Reb Saunders' fanatical passion has clouded his rational thought. He has trapped his son into an unfair situation. He is also trapped by his role as a leader in the Hasidic community. This shows again what Danny wants to avoid by not becoming a tzaddic.



Mr. Malter and Reb Saunders are both fanatical in their own ways. Mr. Malter understands where Reb Saunders is coming from because he believes in the importance of passion and having a purpose in one's life regardless of the consequences.



The Zionist vs. anti-Zionist conflict is turning into its own war. The symbol of blindness returns to show how Reb Saunders is acting closed-minded. The fighting between the Jews because of differing responses to their shared tragedy seems senseless and blind.



Mr. Malter is now acting as single-minded and obsessed as Reb Saunders. In the novel, when someone believes that they have the right cause they become controlled by this cause; they lose individual will or choice.



Reuven thinks that Danny looks blind, showing his fear that, by following his father's rules, Danny is stating to agree with those rules and the Hasidic view of the world.



Rav Gershenson has a practice of asking his students progressively harder questions until they are stumped. Then comes Gershenson's "dreaded silence" after which he asks if anyone else knows the answer. Danny inevitably raises his hand and then a long conversation occurs between the two of them.

Rav Gershenson would cold call students in his class, so everyone had to be prepared for every passage. Towards the end of the semester Reuven had still only been called on once. Danny smiles at Reuven when he gets a difficult answer right, and Reuven becomes sad (rather than angry) all over again, but Reuven's sorrow over losing his friendship is no longer affecting his schoolwork.

During this time Mr. Malter is looking even more frail and doesn't even have time to speak with his son. They no longer study the Talmud together on the Shabbat. In November the UN votes on the Partition Plan and grants Israel land in Palestine. The Malters cry with joy. The next day the school is still filled with the leaflets of Reb Saunders' anti-Zionist league. Reuven is so angry that he wants to punch one of them, but he remembers that he could be expelled for doing this and restrains himself.

As the violence increases against Jewish communities in Palestine, the anti-Zionist groups grow quiet. Their pain over more violence against Jews, after they have already been through the Holocaust, has trumped their hatred of Zionism. Reuven is happy that he restrained his anger earlier.

Mr. Malter has another heart attack. He nearly dies and has to remain in the hospital for over 6 weeks. Danny passes Reuven in the hall and looks at him for the first time in months in order to share his sadness. Reuven now lives alone. He combats the silence by studying, and spends most of this time studying the Talmud. He studies in great depth and cross-references with other forms of the Talmud, using all the techniques his father taught him.

Reuven encounters a very difficult passage and somehow knows that this is the one that Rav Gershenson will ask him about. He reconstructs the text using his father's method and also memorizes all of the text and commentaries.

Rav Gershenson uses silence in his teaching but it is different from Reb Saunders'. He uses silence to teach his students and show them when they do not know something. Not to leave them on their own.



Danny shows that he is still on Reuven's side. Reuven is starting to reach some sort of acceptance of Danny's absence. Reuven is also starting to experience the value of communicating without speaking, a practice which he so despises in Reb Saunders.



Mr. Malter is now fanatical as well. He is sacrificing his time with his son and his own health for the Zionist cause. Yet Reuven still clearly respects his father and supports his cause. The growing success of his cause only makes the anti-Zionists more active. The hatred between the two groups continues.



In spite of their zealous hatred of the Zionist cause, the Hasidim cannot stand more violence after all that they have been through with the Holocaust. They realize that they are ultimately on the same side as other Jews.



Mr. Malter nearly works himself to death. Reuven is now completely alone. When confronted with silence he does what Danny has always done – fills his life with study. He also shows how much he has learned from his father; Reuven is now able to use his father's teachings without his help.



Reuven uses both Mr. Malter's and Reb Saunders' forms of Talmudic study, showing how he has been influenced by both as parental figures.



Rav Gershenson does call on Reuven when it comes to this difficult passage. Reuven starts to explain the passage and goes through it slowly and carefully, dominating the class for four days. Rav Gershenson then asks him some questions ending with whether he is satisfied with the late medieval attempt at interpreting the passage. Reuven says he does not agree with it because it is pilpul (interested in tiny details of no consequence). Gershenson agrees that it is difficult and he cannot truly understand it himself.

Rav Gershenson asks Reuven to stay after class. He asks Reuven whether he studied by himself and Reuven says that he did. Gershenson asks Reuven how his father would have interpreted it. Reuven tells him how he reconstructed the text using different forms of the Talmud. Gershenson says that he is impressed but that Reuven must never use this modern method of explanation in his class.

After school Reuven goes to look up Gershenson's name in the library and he cannot find it anywhere. He realizes that he is not able to publish many things because he works at such a conservative school, and Reuven realizes now why his father does not teach.

This is the major action scene of the novel – a rather sedentary action scene, but suspenseful nonetheless. Reuven proves himself in the most difficult class in the school by demonstrating all that he has learned and showing, therefore, that he will be a good rabbi. In this public interpretation he mostly uses the techniques he learned from Reb Saunders but shows that he disagrees with them in the end.



Reuven proves that he is worthy of Gershenson's respect and that he is successfully able to interpret the Talmud in a novel manner. Gershenson's response, however, also shows the power of tradition in Judaism. Just because the methods Reuven used to interpret the Talmud aren't the traditional methods, Reuven is forbidden from using it.



Reuven learns that even the best professor in school is controlled and held down by tradition. He is not allowed to publish, or even teach what he wants, because of the conservative beliefs of Hirsch College.



CHAPTER 15

Mr. Malter returns home from the hospital but is still too weak to do anything. Rav Gershenson now calls on Reuven regularly and Reuven always answers well. Reuven comes to accept his silence with Danny and they now communicate with their eyes, nods, and gestures.

The violence continues in Palestine, and the Zionist groups become more active. They take off some afternoons to help pack supplies for the soldiers. Mr. Malter tells his son that he was asked to be the Zionist General Council in Palestine for the coming summer before he had his heart attack. He is clearly sad that he will now no longer be able to go.

In the second week of May, Israel becomes a country and Reuven and Mr. Malter weep with joy. But the Arab attacks against the Jewish state continue. Mr. Malter becomes grim and Reuven worries that he will fall ill again from worry.

Reuven's life is starting to come together again after all the turmoil of the last chapter. Reuven is learning the skill of communicating with silence and he realizes that it can work, although it is still only a weak imitation of conversation.



The community is acting like they are involved in a war effort much more than they were during WWII. At that point they followed the war but now they are active participants in the war's aftermath.



The good news is followed by bad. Mr. Malter is personally affected by what occurs in the Jewish homeland.



A graduate of Hirsch college is killed in the fighting around Jerusalem. Reuven did not know him but it makes the violence seem very close to home. There is a memorial service at school, and Reb Saunders' anti-Zionist league dies on that day.

The plight of Israel becomes personal when someone connected to the school dies. The personal impact on characters is inseparable from larger events in Jewish history.



Reuven does very well on his final exams and he goes to the cottage with his father for August. In September, Mr. Malter resumes teaching and Reuven enters his third year of college. He greatly enjoys school and he is now studying philosophy because symbolic logic is a part of philosophy. The war in Israel continues but it is now run by Israelis and is less a worry of American Jews. Then, one day, Danny comes over to Reuven's lunch table and asks him for some help with math.

We truly know when the tension has started to calm when Reb Saunders allows Danny to speak to Reuven again. Danny speaks to Reuven again as if he had never stopped, showing that it was never his choice in the first place. The battle over Zionism has cooled, at least among Brooklyn Jews.



CHAPTER 16

Reuven and Danny, after not speaking for more than two years, talk about the silence they both had to endure. But the conversation quickly turns to Reb Saunders' silence towards his son. Reuven now hates Reb Saunders and has no sympathy for his methods even though Danny still defends them. Reuven helps Danny with his math.

After not talking for two years, they return to conversation right where they left off – with Reb Saunders' silence. They both have new knowledge about the power of silence now, and Reuven has come to hate it even more.



Reuven tells Mr. Malter what happened when he comes home and Mr. Malter says, "what a price to pay for a soul" but will not explain any further. But Reuven describes that his "eyes were dark."

Mr. Malter is also using silence now and Reuven returns to the symbol of the eye, which here is shown as a method of transmitting (or withholding) information.



Danny and Reuven continue their old habit of meeting before and after school. They now dominate Rav Gershenson's class with their debates. Danny tells Reuven that he has now become resigned to experimental psychology and has started to enjoy it and be more critical of Freud.

Danny has come to a positive conclusion about experimental psychology through open conversation with Prof. Appleman. This shows the value of communication when making choices, which Danny lacks in other areas of his life.



Danny has decided to become a clinical psychologist, which means that he will work with people. He will need a doctorate to do this and Appleman has suggested that he attend Columbia. Danny has decided to apply, but he has not yet told his father. Reuven says that he can't believe Danny will become a psychologist and Danny responds that he can't believe Reuven will become a rabbi.

Danny has made his choice but has not yet communicated it to his father, which will be his next hurdle. In their career choices Reuven and Danny are opposites of each other but fit perfectly together, which has been and important part of their friendship from the beginning.



Reuven goes to Danny's sister's wedding and he is the only person there who is not a Hasid. Reb Saunders has aged a lot since he last saw him. Reuven does not like the man she is marrying, who looks severe and has a "limp and moist" handshake.

Again, Reuven shows that he dislikes the lack of choice in Hasidic religion and traditions.



Reuven goes over to see Reb Saunders at the end of the school year. As they are walking up to his study, and old man reaches out and touches Danny's arm and Reuven finds this "distasteful," and he is beginning to feel similarly towards everything associated with Hasidism and Reb Saunders. Reb Saunders asks Reuven why he hasn't been coming over on Shabbat afternoon and Reuven says that he is now studying with his father. Reb Saunders says he wishes he could spend more time talking with Reuven anyway. Reb Saunders mentions nothing about Zionism or the silence he imposed on his son and Reuven, and Reuven decides that he dislikes him even more.

Reuven finds that almost everything in Hasidic tradition is distasteful to him. He especially dislikes the fanatical way in which they worship their leaders. Reb Saunders' avoidance of any mention of Zionism gives Reuven another example of how much he dislikes the Hasidic practice of silence. Reuven is a believer in open communication. Yet, at the same time, Reuven has no desire to ever communicate with Reb Saunders, although Reb Saunders clearly wants to speak with him.



CHAPTER 17

It is Danny and Reuven's last year of college. Reuven tells a joke to Danny about Hasidim, which Danny finds very funny and then Reuven tells one about being able to hear silence and Danny doesn't laugh. Danny says that he is able to listen to silence. Reuven doesn't understand and Danny says that you have to want to listen to be able to hear it.

Although Danny disagrees with some aspects of Hasidic tradition, he has come around to see the value of silence. Reuven hates this practice but in this chapter he comes to learn that silence can be used as a powerful, alternative form of communication.



Reuven tells Danny that he should find a girl to distract himself. Reuven has been going out to dates on Saturdays. Danny says that he cannot because he already has a pre-arranged wife. This is another reason why it will be hard to break from his Hasidic path.

Danny presents another reason that it will be difficult to leave his role. There are other people involved (in addition to his father) in Danny's following tradition and becoming a tzaddic.



Reuven is invited to Danny's brother's bar mitzvah. Levi is tall and thin and after the ceremony becomes deathly ill and is taken to the hospital. Reuven then tells Mr. Malter about Danny's plans to get a doctorate in psychology and not become a tzaddic. He also says that Danny is especially worried by Levi's sickness because he wants his brother to take his place as tzaddic.

Levi gets sick after just the excitement of a bar mitzvah, which does not bode well for his future as a tzaddic. Reuven turns to his father for advice, and Mr. Malter is put in the position of acting as a father figure for both Reuven and Danny as he did early in the novel.



Mr. Malter encourages his son to speak to Danny about how he will break the news of his plan to Reb Saunders. Reuven then asks his father about Reb Saunders' silence and Mr. Malter mutters angrily, "why must they feel the burden of the world is only on their shoulders?" He tells Reuven that he does not really understand; all he knows is that it is a way of bringing up children.

Mr. Malter is clearly bothered by Reb Saunders' silence but he knows that it comes from a point of suffering or "burden." At the same time, he responds to his son with silence when Reuven asks more questions, as he always does when this topic is brought up. Mr. Malter is willing to counsel Danny, but not to interfere in Reb Saunders' parenting techniques, even just to explain them.



Levi returns from the hospital and Danny tells Reuven that Levi should be fine. Danny then says that he is planning to apply to Harvard, Berkeley, and Columbia for fellowships in psychology. Reuven suggests that he should tell his father about it right now and get it over with, but Danny says that he does not want explosions from his father over the meals every day. Reuven suggests that Danny should talk to Mr. Malter.

Mr. Malter tells Danny that he needs to prepare very carefully exactly what he will say. Mr. Malter then asks Danny if he can hear silence. Danny nods. Danny is not angry with his father but he also does not understand why his father acts as he. Mr. Malter says that no one can help Danny because it is between him and his father, but reminds him to plan carefully what to say and anticipate what Reb Saunders' questions will be.

Danny gets in to all three universities. Reb Saunders must have seen the letters because he picks up the mail, but he did not say anything. Danny's sister gets pregnant. Danny says that his father keeps asking why Reuven is not coming over on Shabbat anymore. Reuven says that it is because he studies Talmud with his father on Shabbat, but in reality it is because he does not like Reb Saunders and does not want to see him.

Danny has decided that he will go to Columbia and thinks he might live at his sister's house. Reb Saunders continue to ask Reuven to come over and Reuven says he will try, but does not actually try very hard because he hates Reb Saunders.

Winter turns to spring and Danny has buried himself in his work to keep his anxiety over his father at bay. Reb Saunders asks Reuven (through Danny) to come over on the first or second day of Passover. When Reuven tells his father about this request, Mr. Malter gets angry with Reuven. He says that when someone asks to speak with you, you must speak with them.

Reuven tells his father that Reb Saunders just wanted to study Talmud, and Mr. Malter says that Reuven has not been listening. He says that Reb Saunders wants to talk to Reuven about Danny as he did years ago when Danny was going to the library. Reuven calls Danny to tell him he will come over on Sunday at around 4.

CHAPTER 18

Reuven comes to Danny's house to see Reb Saunders. He first sees Danny, who looks very nervous, and then they both go to Reb Saunders' study. Everything looks the same except Reb Saunders looks old and weary.

Danny is moving forward with his life even though he does not know how to present it to Reb Saunders. This shows how important psychology is to Danny – he has chosen to go for it no matter what.



Throughout the novel the conversations have typically been between pairs. Now the structure has broken and Danny, Reuven and Mr. Malter are all speaking together, showing that there changes occurring in their lives and futures.



Danny's sister is following her role perfectly, as contrasted to Danny's rebellion. No one has mentioned Danny's transgressions but Reb Saunders must know.



Reuven's avoidance of Reb Saunders and the latter's desire to see Reuven is becoming clearer.



This is the second time Mr. Malter ever gets mad at his son; the first was when Reuven turned away Danny in the hospital. Both times involve Reuven not listening, or not giving another the opportunity to share, to communicate.



This conversation demonstrates the symbols of silence and listening. Because Reuven distrusts this form of communication he has not been listening to the way Reb Saunders has been speaking through few words.



Everything in the novel has built up to this chapter – the moment when Danny reveals his choice and breaks with tradition.



Reb Saunders asks Reuven what he will do after graduation and Reuven says that he plans to become a rabbi. Reb Saunders stiffens and says that Reuven and Danny will “begin to go different ways.” Danny looks shocked, but Reb Saunders does not look at his son. He is speaking directly to Reuven. Reb Saunders explains to Reuven (but really to Danny) his use of silence in bringing up his son. Reb Saunders says that he knows Reuven hates him for this, but all he requires is that Reuven listen to him.

Reb Saunders says that man is born evil with only the tiniest spark of good. This spark must be guarded and nourished. The Master of the Universe blessed Reb Saunders with a brilliant son, but that Reb Saunders could see that Danny had no soul. Reb Saunders had a brother who was like Danny. He was very sick but had a brilliant, cold, and “almost cruel” mind. After yeshiva he moved to France and became a mathematician. He died in Auschwitz still a Jew, but not an observer of the Commandments.

Reb Saunders then explains his childhood. Reb Saunders’ father taught him with silence. Reb Saunders as a child had to look into himself to find strength and solace. Reb Saunders’ father explained that words are used to deceive and that only by turning inside oneself can one find one’s own soul. Silence also teaches one about pain and suffering, and it is especially important that a tzaddic know pain. “A tzaddik must know how to suffer for his people.”

Reb Saunders repeated this practice with his son so that Danny would not become like Reb Saunders’ brother. This was the only way he knew to teach Danny’s mind what it is to have a soul. He knew this might prevent Danny from becoming a tzaddic because it would drive him away. But he wanted to make sure that Danny’s soul would be the soul of a tzaddic regardless of what he chose to do with his life.

Reb Saunders begins to cry and say how hard it was to watch his son suffer. But he knew that Danny was learning about the suffering of the world as he needed to. Reb Saunders tells Reuven that he and Mr. Malter have been a blessing. The Master of the Universe sent them when Danny was ready to rebel.

Reb Saunders now speaks to Danny. He asks him whether he will shave his beard and earlocks and Danny nods. He asks him whether he will remain an observer of the Commandments and Danny nods again. Reb Saunders sighs and nods once “as if in final acknowledgement of his tortured victory.”

Reb Saunders actually knew of Danny’s plan all along, as he did with Danny’s reading. Reb Saunders shows that he is more aware of the world around him than it seems. Reb Saunders is maintaining the illusion of silence towards his son by speaking directly to Reuven, but Danny is in the room, which shows that the silence is about to be broken.



We saw a glimpse of the soulless Danny during the softball game, yet his response to Reuven’s injury and all of his later actions show that he has developed one. Intellectual prowess has been praised in the book until now, but Reb Saunders argues that it is also dangerous, that it can take someone away from a relationship with God and with his community.



Bringing up children in silence is a Hasidic tradition. A tzaddic has to take on the pain and suffering of his people (as Mr. Malter said earlier in the novel) and silence teaches a young man how to handle suffering. Silence (like blindness) can be instructive. It is not simply a lack of communication. It is a communication of deeper things.



Reb Saunders taught his son the only way he knew how, the way he had been taught through Hasidic tradition. Although this makes it seem as if he were restrained by his culture, he also knows when to let go: he wants Reuven to have the soul of a tzaddic but will not force him to be one.



Reuven’s friendship with Danny has helped Reb Saunders. As Mr. Malter said, choosing and being a friend is a great responsibility.



This is the first time Reb Saunders speaks directly to his son outside of Talmudic discussions. Reb Saunders believes that he has accomplished his task to save his son’s soul even though Danny will not follow the path that tradition and family chose for him.



Reb Saunders tremulously asks Reuven to forgive him for his anger over his father's Zionism. Reb Saunders had found some small solace in his own understanding of the Holocaust and a secular Jewish state did not fit. He then apologizes to Danny saying, "a wiser father may have done differently. I am not wise." He says he has to leave and that his Daniel is now free.

Danny and Reuven, now alone in the room, both cry. They walk for hours through the streets in complete silence, "saying more with that silence than with a lifetime of words."

Reuven tells Mr. Malter, who responds that this was possibly the only way to raise a tzaddic. Reb Saunders announces to his congregation that Danny will study psychology and that Levi will take his place. Reb Saunders also says that he gives his son his blessing. The congregation is shocked but they don't dare question Reb Saunders' blessing, and everyone gets over it. Reb Saunders also withdraws his promise to the family of the girl Danny is promised to marry, and there is some fuss, but this also quiets down after a while.

The students at Hirsch College are also surprised by Danny's choice. They talk about it for a couple days and then get wrapped up in the rush of final exams. Both Danny and Reuven graduate *summa cum laude*.

Danny comes over to the Malter's to say goodbye, now with his beard and earlocks shaved. Mr. Malter says that Columbia is not so far away and they will see each other soon. Danny says that he and his father are talking now. Mr. Malter asks Danny if he will raise his son in the same way and Danny says that he will if he cannot find another way. Reuven asks Danny to come over on Saturday to study Talmud with his father. Danny agrees and walks away, disappearing down Lee avenue.

Reb Saunders shows that he is not fanatical about his radical manner of bringing up his son – he believes that it may have been the wrong choice, but it was all he knew how to do.



Reuven has now also learned the value of silence. Reb Saunders has been a teacher to Reuven, just as Mr. Malter has been a teacher to Danny.



The great choice of Danny's life, and of most of the novel, resolves itself in a few short pages. Once one makes a well-thought-out choice, and follows through with it, everything else falls into place. His choice affects many other people, but they all accept it.



Again, in the end, no one really cares that much that Danny has broken with tradition.



Reuven and Danny have grown up together. Danny is now moving on and they will no longer be partners in life. Although Danny looks different and is moving on to a much different life, he shows that he will keep many of the traditions of his culture—he has chosen a new role for himself, but will remain an observant Jew.





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