

# **The Last of the Just Study Guide**

## **The Last of the Just by André Schwarz-Bart**

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# Plot Summary

Ernie Levy is the last of the family of Levy to be a Lamed-Vovnik, a Just Man. His story takes place during the years leading up to and during World War II, but the book's story begins in the year 1185, with a slaughter of Jewish men, women and children in York, England. The legend of the Just Men is that God granted that there would be thirty-six men during each generation who would be labeled the Lamed-Vovnik, or the Just Men. Their job, whether they know it or not, is to take on the pain and suffering of all the world, for without even one of the thirty-six, the suffering of the world would be so great that all mankind would cease to exist.

The story begins with the source of the legend and follows quickly through a dozen generations of Levy men before coming to Ernie Levy's immediate family. Mordecai Levy is the first of the Levy men to be so introduced, a devout Jew, though wrestling with some of the constraints of his religion. Mordecai's entire purpose is to see the next Lamed-Vovnik of the Levy family, and it is he who awakens the legend in the heart and mind of Ernie Levy, his grandson.

Ernie Levy is a sweet, sensitive and introspective Jewish boy who wishes only to read stories, playact, and hear the stories of the martyrs of the Just Men. When he first hears of the Lamed-Vovnik he does not believe they could be real, but his educational and religious training at the hands of his grandfather predispose him to believing in their existence, and when Ernie realizes that the next Lamed-Vovnik could be he, Ernie prepares himself physically and mentally for the task.

The journey from believing that he could be the next Lamed-Vovnik and actually becoming the last Just Man takes Ernie through a life of unbelievable torment and torture at the hands of his one-time friends, an experience so foul that as a child he tries to take his own life. When he recovers, two years later, his body is healed, but his spirit never recovers from the experience. World War II is overtaking Europe and Ernie's family travels to France for safety, and for a time there is peace for the Levy family, but Germany conquers France, and Ernie's life becomes that of a madman, where he chooses to believe that he is nothing but a dog and lives as a dog and acts as a dog.

It is the love of a sweet, physically handicapped Jewish girl that brings Ernie out of his madness, and he experiences a short hiatus of true love only to have her snatched from him by the Germans rounding up Jews to take to the concentration camps. Wanting to be with his love, his only purpose for returning to a life of reason, Ernie travels to the concentration camp and actually asks to be admitted. Thinking him a spy, with information for the inmates, Ernie is tortured unbelievably before they finally accept that he really is imbecilic enough to want to be incarcerated.

Ernie's love, Golda, is at the camp, and for a short time they are able to be together, then the train to the final death camp comes and Ernie and Golda are on board with hundreds of frightened Jewish children. Ernie's status as a Just Man is questionable until this time, when he talks to and comforts the terrified children, telling them that they

are going to join their parents, that they will all be together in Paradise very soon, and even in the gas chambers he encourages the little ones to breathe very deeply and very quickly, knowing that their deaths will come that much sooner. Knowing that he cannot prevent their deaths, Ernie chooses to be with them until the end, trying to the best of his human ability to make their death bearable.

The Last of the Just is a story that will stay with the reader for years, coming back to mind anytime there is an injustice in the world, a religious intolerance or a question of the hereafter. Ernie Levy's story is one of the most powerful in literature, and is the first book written by concentration camp survivor, Andre Schwarz-Bart, whose parents perished in the German death camps. The book is not an autobiography, but certainly many of the experiences have been painted with the brush of experience.

# Chapter One, The Legend of the Just Men

## Chapter One, The Legend of the Just Men Summary

In 1185, in England Jews are in a tower and are told they would not be harmed if they converted to Christianity. Rabbi Yom Tov Levy suggests the Jews return to their own God. They agree and Levy kills them. This incident sparked the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik, the just man, of which there are only 36. The purpose of the Just Man is to take all the sufferings of mankind upon himself. The legend continues when Solomon Levy is martyred when he pronounces the Messiah a fake who failed to bring peace to the world. Solomon's son, Manassah is martyred, and his son, Israel, settles in Toulouse where Christians are gentle. His son, Rabbi Mattathias Levy, is gifted in science, astronomy and medicine. Though uncertain as to whether he really is a Just Man, Mattathias' death has been recorded as such, somewhere around 1450.

Joachim Levy, the son of Mattathias flees to Portugal and dies in China. Chaim Levy is sold into a Turkish harem and ordained a priest, though he remains a devout Jew. He is betrayed and tortured. Ephraim Levy, his son, flees from city to city. Ephraim is neither devout nor evil. Ephraim is struck down by a stone. Jonathan Levy, son of Ephraim, is a peddler and a prophet. Ivan the Terrible kills and hangs Ephraim with dogs, claiming them to be of the same religion. Nehemiah Levy, son of Jonathan is crazy and wild. His son, Jacob Levy, is shy and says he is not a Lamed-Vovnik. When locked in a synagogue by the Cossacks with a group of Jews, Jacob sings the Selihoth of Rabbi Solomon ben Simon of Mainz and is slain, but inspires others to pick up the song until they are all slain. His son, Chaim, who survives wanders. In 1792, he arrives in Zemyock and his frostbit legs have to be amputated at the knees. He becomes the first Just Man of the Levys of Zemyock.

## Chapter One, The Legend of the Just Men Analysis

The story, The Last of the Just, begins with the introduction of the book's main character, Ernie Levy, by relating how his story starts in the year 1185 with the gruesome slaughter of Jewish men, women and children in the English town of York. An unlikely survivor of that holocaust becomes the source of the legend arising from yet another historical persecution of the Jews, Solomon Levy, son of the rabbi who aided the personal sacrifice of the trapped Jews in the tower. By becoming a legend, the story is passed from generation to generation for 17 generations, of the nature of the Just Men, the Lamed-Vovnik whose roots lie in the time of Isaiah the prophet. Chapter One is a very lengthy and convoluted history of the first dozen generations of the Lamed-Vovnik of the Levy family. The Lamed-Vovnik are the thirty-six Just Men of the world who bear the worst of the suffering of all the world. Without the Lamed-Vovnik, mankind would cease to exist, for without them the suffering of the world is entirely too great. The

brief histories of the first twelve Just Men demonstrate the great variety of men who are so blessed with the honor, some are more devout and learned than others, but throughout all this history, the legacy of the Lamed-Vovnik has been passed from father to son since 1185.

To be a Lamed-Vovnik and not know it is a life of unspeakable suffering, knowledge that foreshadows the life of Ernie Levy.



# Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 1

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 1 Summary

Chaim Levy, who has spent most of his life wandering, settles in Zemyock, believing himself to be free from discovery, however his identity as a Just Man is not to be denied. He eases the suffering of those he can, and to all others he converses with them on ordinary matters. Chaim believes the label of the Just Man will transfer to his son and that he will die; however, Zemyock is so peaceful Chaim realizes his martyr death might not occur. Chaim becomes father to several daughters and three more sons. Chaim believes he can easily distinguish which of his sons is the Chosen One; however, he sees no obvious sign. His fifth son, known only as Brother Beast is beyond consideration. With his last breath, Chaim names Brother Beast as the Lamed-Vovnik.

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 1 Analysis

The life of Chaim Levy initially follows the way of all other Just Men in that he is pursued from city to city until he finds the isolated peaceful village of Zemyock, where Jews and Christians have lived in a sort of harmony for nearly a century. The tone of chapter two is set with the discovery of Zemyock where the frenetic pace of the book slows to consider a period of deeper reflection both in the Legend of the Just Man and in getting to know the mind of the current Just Man of Zemyock, Chaim Levy. The nature of the Just Man is as varied as there are men in the Levy succession. Some know their status and glory in it, others either do not know or find no glory in it. Chaim knows of his status, but is puzzled by it. His nature in regard to the position of Lamed-Vov is one of humility and on occasion, denial. Yet, after each denial, his interpretation upon hearing the Word proves he has been touched by the hand of God. Because of that history, his pronouncement that Brother Beast is the New Lamed-Vovnik is accepted, though questioned.

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 2

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 2 Summary

Brother Beast mourns at his father's bedside. The New Just Man wishes to change nothing in his life. The thought of marriage terrorizes him. His only friend is his nephew, Joshua Levy, who is called the Absentminded. Brother Beast names Joshua as the next Just Man. Joshua promises his second wife that her child will be the next Just Man, but on his deathbed, he names a nephew. This leaves the Levy family looking for some form of reason by which God makes his choice of the next generation's Just Man.

Jews can not take a job in the new Polish factories because of their Sabbath rules and die of hunger. Other Jews, flee to other countries. Mordecai Levy chooses to seek work. He finds the world cruel and must fight for every crumb. Rather than following Jewish tradition and meekly submitting, Mordecai becomes a raging bull.

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 2 Analysis

For Brother Beast to be chosen as the next Lamed-Vovnik shows the Jewish God to have a sense of humor. Chaim's other sons and the villagers have a seriousness about them that precludes humor. Chaim tells them that God is laughing at them, not to hurt them, but to chide them for failing to see all manner of good. There is symbolism with the choosing of Brother Beast allowing for love of souls not made perfect; after all, Chaim is legless. Yet, the villagers of Zemyock put too much importance on the position of the Just Man and so God had Chaim choose the least among them for the honor. As it likely should be, Brother Beast remains unchanged by the position. He is a symbol of goodness and purity and yet the villagers are still unmoved by God's message. When his nephew, Joshua, is chosen next, the world of the villagers is rocked even further by the unprecedented passing of the title from a man to one who is not his son. Groups form as a result, battling for the honor, and God continues to confound them. Their lessons are not yet learned. With Mordecai, the habits of the Jewish people keep his family hungry, and he finds work on a farm. His desire is to use his size and determination to work so well he will be accepted. The converse turns out to be true. The harder he works, the more his coworkers resent him. All of his efforts to be peaceable are met with hostility and finally he must fight to be accepted. This foreshadows all the events to come when the twentieth century dawns a few years later.

## **Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 3**

### **Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 3 Summary**

Away from Zemyock, Mordecai finds a fire inside of himself, which he hides at home. He is consumed with questions on the meaning of his life. He sees a young Jewish woman, Judith, drawing water from the well and is immediately entranced. Judith treats him with disdain. When Judith points out the synagogue and turns away without speaking, Mordecai is filled with the familiar flame of combat. Seeking forgiveness, he asks to carry the water for her, but reminding him that he is a peddler and will be gone tomorrow, Judith denies him.

### **Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 3 Analysis**

Mordecai Levy changes the course of the Levy's of Zemyock by leaving Zemyock to find work. His experiences with non-Jews teach him to fight for his rights, and he finds that he enjoys the battle and the taste of victory. His manner becomes very non-Jewish. He is not meek and humble, he walks tall and erect and with confidence. A chance meeting gives Mordecai the freedom to seek a life outside of Zemyock. When he meets Judith he is immediately attracted to her. Sparks fly at their initial meeting, predicting their future life together to be one of volatility. Mordecai is true to his nature both in life and in love. The fire of desire burns brightly in him, and he has learned to pursue what he wants.

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 4

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 4 Summary

Mordecai is invited to join the rabbi for dinner and is persuaded to accept. Mordecai postures as a Levy from Zemyock and makes one profound proclamation. The village believes him to be a Just Man. Mordecai does not correct their mistake and stays the winter to recover from a fever. Judith cannot deny that she is attracted to Mordecai, but feels that God is playing a fine joke on her that she should fall in love with a Lamed-Vovnik when there are only thirty-six in the entire world. Mordecai tells Judith at their betrothal that he is required to return to Zemyock to write his family history. Judith refuses to accompany him. Mordecai arrives in Zemyock with food and luxuries from his future family and finds them still starving. His family condemns him because Judith refused to come with him. His father warns him that for men who are destroyed by a woman there will be no judge or justice.

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 4 Analysis

In a way, Mordecai's trick of using his Zemyock Levy Just Man connection backfires on him. He knows he is not a Just Man, but after posing as one to win Judith's hand, he is unable to get anyone to believe that he is not. Mordecai has found happiness and laughter in Judith of Krichovnick. When he returns to Zemyock to his family in order to write his history before his marriage to Judith, he is greeted with hunger, starkness, pain, suffering, judgment all the things a Lamed-Vovnik is to bear for the world.

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 5

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 5 Summary

Mordecai returns to Judith much changed and Judith suspects that he no longer loves her, but he reveals his father refuses to give them his blessing. Mordecai becomes happy and gay but then morose, wondering if Judith, is a devil in disguise. He convinces Judith to return to Zemyock. Judith is viewed as an outrageous gypsy. She tries to fit in but is unsuccessful, but Mordecai is able to quiet her with a touch. Judith's desire is to understand why the Just Men have to suffer so. Judith suffers three miscarriages and all the babies in Zemyock have died by their second month. When asking the reigning Lamed-Vovnik for advice, he tells her to remain as she is and not to change. Mordecai is shocked by how their five year stay in Zemyock has aged her. He is afraid that problems may kill Judith's growing baby. For the first time, Mordecai wonders if even God wishes the death of infants.

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 5 Analysis

Zemyock is a strange village. For Chaim before, it was a tranquil village where a Just Man could die in his bed. Mordecai has lived in Zemyock until forced to travel afar for food. Away from Zemyock, Mordecai finds joy and laughter; he finds his true love, Judith. When Mordecai returns to Zemyock to write his history, his previous dolorous personality takes over and he is seemingly immune to joy. By taking Judith as his wife, he ignores his father and Zemyock, but the pull is too great and soon Mordecai and Judith return to Zemyock. As full of life as Judith is, she cannot combat the pall of Zemyock. Living there takes the life of her first three babies, ages her beyond her years and gives her the look of a discontented woman. The former peacefulness of Zemyock has turned into a time of fear, hunger and uncertainty, foreshadowing the uncertainty of the times ahead.

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 6

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 6 Summary

Mordecai and Judith's first son is so little at birth that they name him Benjamin, but refer to him as the Mosquito. Judith has three more sons, and Mordecai spends all his time and energy educating them. Benjamin needs to be constantly in motion. Benjamin wonders if there might not be a greater Just Man somewhere other than in Zemyock. When Benjamin meets the reigning Just Man, Benjamin lifts the man's hand to his own head, thereby blessing himself. Benjamin goes to Bialystock for two years to finish his tailoring apprenticeship and befriends Mr. Goldfaden. Mr. Goldfaden says he will then starve to death when he can no longer work. Goldfaden states he is not a good Jew because he no longer believes in God. Goldfaden is replaced by a younger, stronger man who is truly an unbeliever.

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 6 Analysis

Benjamin is initially the most insignificant of Mordecai's and Judith's sons. He is named Mosquito, is not educated in his religion and is sent to be a tailor's apprentice despite his inability to sit still. A pattern is revealed in this chapter. The most important member of a family is the one who seems to be the least likely to be important in the opinion of the family. God's plan is far beyond the puny reasoning of man, even man as smart and dynamic as Judith and Mordecai. They failed to see the miracle that Benjamin is, the first "fruit" after a long famine. Man is forever dissatisfied with his lot in life and is always looking for more. Benjamin is wiser than his parents from the Mr. Goldfaden's revelation as to his disbelief in God. Benjamin understands Mr. Goldfaden to be a good Jew who is tired of suffering, and the man's replacement is a shallow, evil, true unbeliever. This understanding, however, brings Benjamin to the edge of despair.

## Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 7

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 7 Summary

It is 1915, and the Just One pronounces that the evils of war are a direct result of the faithful turning their backs on God. News reaches Zemyock of the deaths of relatives in battle. The worst is that Jewish brother is killing Jewish brother, driving those forced into combat into madness. News of coming persecution reaches Zemyock and some flee and some do not. After several false alarms, Benjamin, Judith and Mordecai flee, turning back once to see the destruction the Cossacks wreck on their village. One soldier chases them and Mordecai kills him. All three of Benjamin's older brothers are killed. The Just Man begs the soldiers to kill him, but they only cut off his beard, denying his desire for martyrdom. All Mordecai's sons, save for Benjamin, are dead and the Lamed-Vovnik is alive. Mordecai feels betrayed by both his family and his God. Mordecai wonders if God is, perhaps, just a little bit evil.

### Chapter 2, Zemyock, Part 7 Analysis

When fleeing the Cossacks in Zemyock, Benjamin looks back at the village and is struck by the dichotomy of the beauty of the scene being spoiled by crawling black figures, like ants all over a delectable picnic. There is also a reference to the blue sky overhead, blue and untouched and still, all the while the destruction going on beneath. The blue sky as a symbol is used several times throughout the book. Benjamin also realizes that there are multiple truths and wonders how to know which one is real. Benjamin and Judith believe the survival of the Just Man among so much death to be a joke of God's, and that the Levy's claim to the Lamed-Vovnik legend to be ridiculous. Only Mordecai wonders if that is true.

# Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 1

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 1 Summary

Benjamin chooses exile from Zemyock after the attack and settles in Germany, believing that to be a German Jew will bring him contentment. Berlin disappoints him. He finds work as a tailor, sleeps among the many homeless in the synagogue and wonders at the cruelty the Jews show toward one another. One of the homeless is Yankel the Balician, a young man whose hands tremble like those of an old man. Benjamin offer to share his meals with Yankel, who is sometimes friendly, other times nasty. Benjamin labels such behavior "Berlin madness," something he begins to see in all those around him. They unsuccessfully try to provoke Benjamin into insulting just one of them.

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 1 Analysis

As did his father before him, Benjamin seeks to leave Zemyock and chooses Berlin, but Berlin is a place of madmen, people living too closely together without enough food or work or places to live. Benjamin sees a sort of madness come over the people, Jews and Germans alike, and it hurts his tender heart. His attempt to befriend Yankel speaks of Benjamin's kindness despite Yankel's unpredictable rebuffs. Benjamin's experience gives rise to the questions that provoke the Jewish nation—do disagreeable experiences allow mankind to turn into animals without consequence? With the current political and religious intolerances that Benjamin already saw in Zemyock, the human conditions and sufferings that are being endured cause one to wonder where the Lamed-Vovnik are, or if mankind is in trouble.



## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 2

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 2 Summary

Yankel speaks to Benjamin one evening and Benjamin sees Yankel's spiritual suffering. Yankel apologizes for his harsh words and Benjamin pours out his burden of living in Berlin. Berlin is very different from Zemyock in Poland, and Benjamin is suffering. Benjamin notices that Yankel has been beaten, but Yankel refuses to explain, though he does share the horrors of the pogrom two years before that leveled his town. Yankel hid in a well and when it was over buries every person in his village. Yankel joined a Spartacist rally, as a Jew had the right to rally and was beaten for his efforts. Benjamin goes to bed and sleeps badly.

The next morning, Yankel is gone, but three months later returns for one last visit. He looks different and is distant and indifferent. He alludes to the black market by saying that everything in Berlin is bought and sold. Benjamin tries one last time to reach Yankel, but Yankel leaves Benjamin a fortune and tells him to go home to Poland where he will not be at risk of losing his Jewish identity as he, Yankel, did.

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 2 Analysis

Yankel, in his strange, mad way, tries to get Benjamin to see that Berlin is not the place for Benjamin. Yankel knows that his own madness is caused by the killing of all the people in his village two years earlier, and all he remembers seeing is the unbroken circle of blue sky from down at the bottom of the water well. Again, that symbol of clear blue sky while below is chaos, mayhem and murder. Then the silence, probably more horrible than the sound of the attack because when Yankel comes up from the well, he is the only survivor of his village, which this affects him forever. He knows he is tainted and a little bit mad, but he sees a gentle sweetness in Benjamin that is worth saving, so he gives Benjamin a gift of money telling him to leave Berlin and go home.

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 3

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 3 Summary

Benjamin meets the Rabbi of Stillenstadt, who sets him up in a tailoring shop at a very good rent, though the equipment and tools are old. As a victim of the Slavic persecutions, Benjamin is a novelty. His crate is filled with the tools of his trade, and he refuses to part with the crate even to eat. While he eats, at the Rabbi's table he begins to see visions in his soup of his father, mother and Yankel, and the visions cause him to cry. All the Jewish neighbors come to watch the new Jew eat his dinner, and it is decided that Benjamin is eat every noon meal with the rabbi and his wife. Benjamin feels returned to the fold and is filled with great emotion and thankfulness.

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 3 Analysis

While in Berlin, Benjamin knew he had exiled himself to the wrong city; it was too big, too busy, too full of non-Jews, too crowded, without enough food, lodging or work. Yankel sees in Benjamin something that he had lost with the deaths of his village family, a sweet and kind soul who does not belong in Berlin. His gift of money to get Benjamin out of Berlin is reminiscent of the peddler who gave his father, Mordecai, a similar gift to leave Zemyock. These two seers know that a change of environment is necessary for the survival of those two men. Benjamin's life in Stillenstadt becomes the haven he had hoped to find, much like the one Chaim found in Zemyock years before.

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 4

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 4 Summary

Benjamin sets up shop as an excellent tailor. Benjamin must be creative and fit i, so panders to all, especially the Christian population, not seeing how blackly the unemployed Christians have classified him. Benjamin learns of Jews who convert to Christianity and become highly successful. One such convert wishes to return to the synagogue. Benjamin has compassion for the man, and each accusation is as if it were directed at himself. They ask Benjamin for his opinion. He hides his hometown identity, but refers to a 15th century rabbi who returns to Judaism and imposes on himself a continual penance. The would be returnee renounces Judaism and leaves.

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 4 Analysis

Benjamin believes himself to have found a peace on earth in Stillenstadt, making clothes and remaking clothes for his Christian customers. His efforts to win them over remind the reader of his father's efforts to win over the Christian farm workers, that if he worked hard and well enough that he would be accepted. As was true then, so it is now, and will continue on in the legacy of his own son—even though the Christians frequent his shop, they speak very badly of Benjamin behind his back, saying he is taking bread out of the mouths of unemployed Christians. While Benjamin is ignorant of these thoughts, he is aware that he only feels completely at peace at a Jewish table, with fellow Jews. His failed attempt to bring about an agreeable penance for the Jew turned Christian, returning to the fold is thrown back in his face.

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 5

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 5 Summary

Benjamin invites his parents to live in Stillenstadt. Judith realizes that she has never understood her son. Benjamin's parents are a strange sight, dressed all in black and definitely from the old country. Mordecai realizes that no one in Stillenstadt knows Benjamin is a Levy from Zemyock. Benjamin becomes ill with a fever at being with his family again. He recovers and is joyful and happy. Mordecai believes that the legacy of the Just Men may have died with his other three sons. He looks to Judith for guidance. He unsuccessfully attempts to produce another son, though Judith is fifty. They cease to live as man and wife. He turns to Benjamin to learn to sew buttons, but Mordecai is too clumsy. Benjamin implores him to just be the pure one from God. Mordecai's decides a grandchild may be the next Just Man, and so introduces Benjamin to Fraulein Blumenthal.

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 5 Analysis

While living in Stillenstadt is good for Benjamin and Judith, Mordecai is now the one who suffers. The loss of his other sons dealt him a mortal blow and he is now a shadow of his former self; his hair is white; he is stooped; however, he is still a tree of a man. For a long time Mordecai repines in his new home, until he hits on the idea that a Lamed-Vovnik just might come from one of his grandchildren. His new mission in life is now to get Benjamin married. His entire mission in life is to continue the Levy tradition of the Just Man.

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 6

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 6 Summary

Mordecai says Benjamin has to tell the girl's family who they really are. Benjamin refuses and says he will tell his sons when they become men. Judith asks God to spare them from having a Just Man. Mordecai parts emotionally from his son and lets go of his dream of a Just Man in the family. Benjamin's wife is simple but she realizes her only purpose is to bear the legacy of the Levys. Benjamin's mother wants to raise their children. The couple do not express their love to each other except when death is imminent at the concentration camp. In doing so, Judith, who never before wanted it, aligns herself solidly with the Levys. The child, Moritz, involves himself in the street gangs. Moritz feels Christians and Jews should be happily united.

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 6 Analysis

Mordecai prevails on the issue of marriage and Benjamin and Fraulein Blumenthal are joined in marriage. Benjamin wishes to keep the Levy Lamed-Vovnik legend a secret; his mother agrees, until a child is born, and in order to stay in a position of authority over the child, Judith firmly allies herself with the Levys, legend and all. Benjamin's wife is never known as anything other than Fraulein Blumenthal (even though she really is now Frau Levy) throughout the rest of the story, using a literary technique to rank her as a most unimportant person. Moritz, Benjamin's son shows no indication of continuing the Lamed-Vovnik legend, but his questions of why Christians and Jews cannot live together peacefully predict the increasing tensions between the two.

## **Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 7**

### **Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 7 Summary**

Benjamin's second son, Ernie, is even more puny than Moritz and is too small and insignificant for his grandmother to notice. A strange bond develops between Ernie and his grandfather and Ernie imitates his grandfather. Mordecai tells Ernie about the Just Man Legacy, but Ernie does not believe the stories, which devastates Mordecai. At school, Ernie wins many awards. Judith does not approve of Ernie reading fairy tales, but Benjamin defends Ernie. Ernie "becomes" a part of the story.

### **Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 7 Analysis**

Ernie is a mystery to his family. Mother Judith calls him her little angel, not understanding his desire to read stories that transport him. Fraulein Blumenthal simply wishes to have him as her own as a trophy against the Levys. Benjamin is seemingly indifferent to the boy. Only Mordecai sees in Ernie that possibility that at very long last, this one just might be a Lamed-Vovnik. Mordecai pours into the little boy every last bit of teaching and knowledge that he has, reading from the book of the family history and teaching him as if he were a learned prophet instead of a little boy. Mordecai's high hopes are dashed when Mordecai asks Ernie the stories of the martyrs could be true and Ernie denies that they could be. Ernie's propensity for imagining, brought on by his advanced learning and incessant reading, predisposes him to flights of fancy and later to bouts of madness.

## Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 8

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 8 Summary

Ernie playacts his life as a chivalrous hero. He spends his time with a gang of Christian children but leaves them when he is required to fight or wield a sword in the playacting. The friends decide to portray Passion of Christ, choosing Ernie to be the Jew who put Christ to death. Ernie refuses to utter, "crucify him." The children insist that Ernie crucified Jesus. The children spit on Ernie and attack him and he is knocked unconscious. Two boys carry Ernie to his house. He lies, unconscious, still protesting that he never said to kill Jesus.

### Chapter 3, Stillenstadt, Part 8 Analysis

The scene of Ernie being persecuted in the play yard is one of the first overt scenes of anti-Semitic violence shown. All prior violence is alluded to, but is mostly off-screen. This scene is dramatic, violent, and very upsetting. Ernie is the product of his history, a sweet, tender, gentle Jewish boy growing up in a world of Christians who believe that the Jews killed their Christ. This is one reason for Antisemitism; there are as many other reasons as there are people who feel they have reason to hate the Jews. Now that the gloves are off, the remainder of the book demonstrates overt anti-Semitic violence.

# Chapter 4, the Just Man of the Flies, Part 1

## Chapter 4, the Just Man of the Flies, Part 1 Summary

Ernie's family is on their way to the synagogue when Benjamin hears the song of the Nazis. The Levy family separates with Ernie and Joshua going together. Ernie protects Joshua emotionally saying he can remove his Jewish looking hat and Ernie will stand in for Joshua with God. When the Levys all meet at the synagogue, Moritz has a turn at being a guard during services, and Ernie suddenly decides to stay with his older brother.

## Chapter 4, the Just Man of the Flies, Part 1 Analysis

The years before the beginning of World War II have reached Stillenstadt. Nazi patrols roam the streets; signs have appeared in some of the windows saying, "No dogs or Jews," and even children as young as Ernie know that their world is changing. The journey alone, without an adult, to the synagogue is one of growth for Ernie. He realizes just how responsible he is for his brother and how vulnerable his brother is. Ernie builds his determination with the repetition of the thought that if they come at them then he, Ernie, will just spring at them. At this time, Ernie has no idea, really, what the Nazi patrols might do. There is still the belief that the Nazis will not enter a dwelling to get after even the Jews. History tells the reader that this belief is erroneous, but for now the Jewish people have some degree of comfort in their homes. They do understand that now the streets of their cities can be dangerous, and even their places of worship at risk.



## Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 2

### Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 2 Summary

Moritz, Ernie and two other boys talk of how they will repel a Nazi attack do not really believe an attack will happen. When they hear Nazis approaching, Moritz throws Ernie into the courtyard where all the members are gathered. Ernie is stunned to see a familiar face amongst the uniforms and believes God will save everyone. A window opens and a teacher from Ernie's school, Herr Kremer, shouts at the Nazis to stop them, but is shouted down by a Nazi consumed with hatred and anger. Mr. Kremer retreats back inside his home. Frau Tuszynski shouts that God will crush them in His hands. The Nazi leader strikes her and breaks her collarbone. Ernie runs screams in protest and hands her the wig. He is struck also and rolls up against the Frau Tuszynski.

### Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 2 Analysis

The increasing descriptive intensity of the persecution of the Jews begins to bother the reader, but because it is a little insidious, it is more easily accepted, perhaps the way a little bit of intolerance is accepted leading the way for greater levels of intolerance. Mordecai is separated from his family, and he watches Ernie's performance from a distance and all he sees is the child as a sacrificial lamb. Mordecai now has his answer; for him, Ernie is, truly a Lamed-Vovnik.

## Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 3

### Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 3 Summary

Mordecai picks up Ernie, carries him home, and puts him to bed himself. Mordecai locks the door and reads once again the Levy history of the Lamed-Vovnik. He stops to evaluate whether Ernie has any greater understanding than in previous readings and alters his style to meet Ernie's understanding. Ernie seems to understand that he may be the next Just Man and he asks his grandfather what a Just Man does with his life, but Mordecai answers calmly that if Ernie really is a Just Man, one day he will just begin to glow.

Ernie goes through a strange episode where he has visions—Ernie tells Frau Tusznski of his vision that all is well because he is a Lamed-Vovnik. Ernie is caught in the throes of his visions but chooses to let his family think he has simply collapsed. At night he continues his training as a Lamed-Vovnik by teaching himself to hold his breath until he passes out. He holds a flame to his palm to teach himself to endure suffering. At first he believes he is invincible, but then he does feel the pain of his self-inflicted injury, but feels only joy. He will be ready for the holocaust and save his family and all the Jews from destruction.

### Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 3 Analysis

Recalling Ernie's early education with Mordecai, how he imitated his grandfather even down to his mannerisms, the reader will see a tendency on Ernie's part to daydream. Remember how he would lose himself in tales of heroism, believing himself to be that hero. Ernie, himself, cannot tell his Grandfather the real reason Ernie stood up the Nazi soldiers when the entire congregation quaked behind him, but because Mordecai believes Ernie to possibly be a Lamed-Vovnik, Ernie now believes it wholeheartedly. Because of this belief, Ernie embarks on a self-inflicted training program to harden himself, not quite understanding the purpose of the Lamed-Vovnik. Ernie believes the Lamed-Vovnik to be a hero, saving the Jewish people from persecution. He fails to understand that the Just Man is merely to take on one thirty-sixth of the suffering of the world. A question begins to grow in the reader's mind, does Mordecai have the right to place such a huge burden on the shoulders of so young a child? The previous stories of the Just Men do not indicate just how young each of them were when they realized the responsibility of their position.

## **Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 4**

### **Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 4 Summary**

Ernie's family is puzzled about the burned hand, but Ernie remains silent. Mordecai confronts Ernie privately and learns that Ernie is hardening his body. Mordecai realizes Ernie misunderstands the purpose of the Just Man. Ernie is devastated to realize that the Jews are not like other men and that God must be angry at the Jews to allow them to suffer so. Ernie promises that his training as a Lamed-Vovnik will cease and that he will take on suffering for Mordacai. Ernie realizes he must be insignificant to be a Lamed-Vovnik, which causes Ernie to be humbled and to find compassion. Ernie begins to act strangely, kissing his grandmother's hand, staring at his mother as if seeing her truly for the first time, and also scrutinizing Herr Half Man with compassion that is interpreted as derision. Ernie realizes that he must take on people's suffering without looking at them for too long.

### **Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 4 Analysis**

The increasing awareness of just what it might be to take on the role of the Just Man causes Ernie to look at those around him with new eyes. However, this intense scrutiny unnerves all who experience it. Ernie believes that it is as simple as taking on their suffering without looking at them too long. He is still too young and inexperienced to realize that he is trying to force the role of Lamed-Vovnik on himself and yet, for the reader, this is an interesting experience as this is the first time the reader is allowed into the head of a Lamed-Vovnik as he comes to realize his special role.

## Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 5

### Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 5 Summary

Ernie is scolded by all in his household. Ernie feels he has failed once again at trying to reach the souls around him and needs some way to ground himself. Benjamin sends Ernie out to buy a shoehorn, which is Ernie's first foray into the world with his new knowledge. Ernie tries to explain that he needs a shoehorn, but is unable to express himself and pantomimes, which leads to further confusion and the little girl screams for help, though Ernie continues explains his need. The little girl screams again for help. This brings on a spewing of hatred toward all Jews, with Ernie being called a dirty little fiend by the grocer's wife. Mother Judith is determined to defend Ernie without even knowing what actually happened. However, Mother Judith strikes Ernie in her frustration, further alienating her grandson, and Ernie calmly declares his intention to run away.

### Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 5 Analysis

Ernie's confusion is understanding, there is no manual on how one becomes a Just Man, and Ernie is a little boy with a little boy's vivid imagination. He is trying the best way he knows how to be a worthy Lamed-Vovnik, but he simply does not know how to do it. The harder he tries to perform his new job well, the worse it is for him and his family. Ernie believes that he understands them, and that by looking into their souls in his visions, he has the greatest of compassion for them, but all they see is a very strange little boy staring at them. His behavior in the grocer's store merely frightens the little girl, causing everyone who did not witness the event to believe that he had somehow molested the girl. Mother Judith's initial defense of him against the neighbors does not last inside their home where she strikes him in her frustration. Poor Ernie has no choice but to leave home; he feels he must find a place where his new talents can be used and appreciated.

## **Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 6**

### **Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 6 Summary**

Ernie believes that by running away from home he will grow up. Ernie meets a farm boy, who gives Ernie empathy he has not received from his family. Ernie lies down in a field to sleep and closely examines a fly on a flower. He captures the fly and each time he feels her bumping against his hand, he feels sympathy and grief as he understands her terror. He realizes that no matter how small the fly is, its fear of death would be just as great as his own fear. He releases the fly and decides that if he is not worthy enough to be a Just Man of men, then he would simply be a Just Man of the Flies. A farmer offers Ernie a ride home, guessing that he is the son of the Levys and observing that there are good people and bad people all over. Ernie asks the farmer if he was against them, which offends the farmer, though he still drops Ernie off outside his door.

### **Chapter 4, The Just Man of the Flies, Part 6 Analysis**

The remarkable part of Ernie's encounters on his journey away from home is that the first little boy takes Ernie at face value, provides him with information and food, yet asking nothing of Ernie's background or religious affiliation. The second encounter with the farmer starts out the same way, until the farmer and Ernie come to a discussion of Ernie's religious affiliation and Ernie is puzzled by why the farmer may be against the Jews just because they are Jews. The encounter with the little fly in the field is a turning point for Ernie, where he realizes that if he is not good enough to be a Just Man of people, he would simply be a Just Man of the flies because he felt he could understand the tiny fly's fear. It could be, however, that the fly did not talk back and try to change any of Ernie's perceptions, which are still being developed on his position as a Lamed-Vovnik

# **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 1**

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 1 Summary**

The schoolteacher who defended the Jews at the synagogue, is a German who fought in the previous war and suffers still from physical and emotional wounds. He thinks facism is a temporary insanity and that the bad boys will be sent back to school or to the bars. When the synagogue is burned down and he sees the Jewish children targeted, his opinion changes. At first he does nothing, but his sensitive heart causes him to step in to prevent hostilities toward the Jewish children. Soon hostile messages are left on his classroom blackboard calling him a Jew lover. Herr Kremer strikes back at the intolerance of the Jewish people in his own quiet way. He invites Ernie Levy and Ilse Bruckner for tea for their accomplishments in German and singing, respectively. The two children represent the full circle of his friends. He has always been interested in children but has never been closely involved with them. He desires to understand life and realizes that even with his death, life will continue; this gives Herr Kremer happiness.

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 1 Analysis**

Initially Herr Kremer seems to be a retiring, ineffectual man who is unable to stop the Nazi assault on the Jewish people in the synagogue across the street from his apartment, and in his initial disregard for how the Hitler Youth were treating the Jewish children at his school. Finally he is outraged enough at the roman-like treatment of the young children that he becomes the mascot-protector of the Jewish children. His desire to get to know Ernie and Ilse better is two-fold. First he wishes to get to know the children more intimately, seeing how alike they are, and secondly he wishes to invite a Jew and non-Jew to his home as friends.

# **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 2**

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 2 Summary**

Ilse had been one of the children who had attacked Ernie for killing their Christ, and Ernie is uncertain about meeting her again. He brings a lekach, a honey cake that Judith, makes for the occasion. When Herr Kremer leaves the room, Ilse says she hopes Ernie does not hold it against her or her cousin, Hans. Ernie is willing to forgive Ilse anything. He is smitten with her beauty and her ability to sing. He is even willing to forgive that she is cousin to Hans Schliemann, who is one of Ernie's worst tormentors.

Herr Kremer seats Ernie next to Ilse; whereas, before Jewish children sat in the back of the classroom. Hans is offended and verbally attacks Ilse. Ilse asks if he is jealous, then offers Hans a feel of her nipples to keep him quiet so she can pursue some sort of relationship with Ernie. Ilse's motives are not pure, but Ernie is unaware of this. The tea parties continue until Hans tells Ilse's mother and Ilse is beaten and warned to never see Ernie again. Ilse claims that Ernie loves her. Herr Kremer is removed from his position at the school; his tolerance of Jews is not acceptable behavior of a teacher of Hitler Youth.

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 2 Analysis**

The attempt on Herr Kremer's part to bring together a Jew and a non-Jew in a neutral environment where they could be civilized and have tea is likely his way of trying to right the wrongs of a society that was rapidly getting out of control. He believes that perhaps just his effort alone might make some sort of difference, and had everyone during that time tried to do the same, some of the atrocities of World War II may not have occurred. At that time Herr Kremer was an innocent, totally out of his element, and he recognizes a kindred spirit in Ernie. He thinks he made a good choice in bringing Ilse into the mix, perhaps believing that she would make a difference with her cousin, Hans, and prevent some of the attacks on the Jewish children that are happening at his school. Sadly, both Herr Kremer and Ernie are too innocent for the child/woman, Ilse, who has a heart of stone.

"Raising a corner of the curtain, she saw Ernie hunched over the table, lost in contemplation of a black speck in the middle of a puddle of milk. He seized the black speck, which was a fly, and approached the red-hot oven with his arm extended. Ilse had the sudden feeling that Ernie was performing a malevolent rite of the Jews, and everything about him suddenly disgusted her—his thin white wrists and ankles, the

curve of his neck, even the graceful movement of his round arm above the gaping oven. . . . But immediately abashed, she saw the fly hopping about on the end of Ernie's thumb, then trotting peacefully on the palm of his hand. Finally, chasing a last wisp of steam, the fly was on the ceiling in one light hop!" Page 217 - 218, Chapter 5.

The beautifully symbolic part of this portion of Chapter 5 is evaluating the above passage as an allegory. Ernie takes on the suffering of all humankind, and his encounter with the fly shows how important he is to the world; as the Just Man, Ernie's acceptance of the suffering of his fellow Jews allows the souls of all the Jews who have been burned in the German ovens to fly straight to heaven, just as they fly which had been trapped in the milk was allowed to first dry itself and then fly on the rising heat of the oven directly up to the ceiling.



## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 3**

### **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 3 Summary**

Herr Geek, the new teacher, is a small, peasant, mean, aggressive, man who bursts into the classroom with resounding shouts of, "Heil Hitler!" At first, Ernie finds his hand pointing to the ceiling with the rest of the class, which he brings down in shame. The Jewish students are grouped with dogs and Negroes and separated at the back of the room. He asks why the Jewish people want to dominate the universe. Herr Geek delights in physically and emotionally tormenting the Jewish children. He tries to force the Jewish students to sing German patriotic songs and when it is Ernie's turn, he meekly offers his arm for punishment. Even though he is injured, Ernie is pleased that he did not deny his heritage or beliefs.

### **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 3 Analysis**

The violence against the Jews is escalating to the point that there is no safety in previously safe environs. It used to be that school was a place of higher learning, but education now is that of religious intolerance. Implicit is the idea that if the government is behind a teacher, then any behavior on the part of the teacher against the Jewish dogs is acceptable. There is a decline in social standards, and the very elements the Germans claim to fear from the Jews are the very attributes that they themselves display, almost as if by taking a preemptive strike they will prevent being conquered by a peaceable people.

# **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 4**

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 4 Summary**

Ernie goes to meet Ilse as he does every day by the Schlosse. The sight of her lightens his heart and prompts him to kiss her cheek. Hans Schliemann sees and is incensed that Ilse would allow this. Ernie is attacked by the gang of boys who are still angry at his passive acceptance of punishment, which had confused their values. It is Ernie's gentleness that confuses them. The boys pummel and humiliate Ernie. When they pull his pants down, Ernie finally fights back. The boys run off, and as Ernie turns to Ilse, she, too, runs. Ernie is totally humiliated.

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 4 Analysis**

Ernie's treatment at the hands of first his teacher and then the gang of boys he goes to school with is at first tolerable. There is no idea or thought of being a Lamed-Vovnik during this time. Throughout this entire afternoon, Ernie tries to handle himself with the poise and upbringing Mordecai and Benjamin have given him, to be a peace-loving Jew, not wishing to cause any sort of trouble for anyone. Herr Geek is the representative of the evil-German government machine that is quickly consuming Europe and disbelieving any protests from the Jewish students that they have no wish for war or world domination. Ironically, of course, it is Germany's wish for war and to dominate. Had the afternoon ended with what happened at school, Ernie may have escaped wiser, but unscathed. The events following school are the final blow and Ernie is unable to withstand any more torment; he must finally fight back, but by fighting back, he loses Ilse. He still does not understand her fascination with him is merely fascination, there is no feeling of friendship or compassion in her. Ernie is a unique specimen, and she merely enjoys observing him. She revels in his admiration and love, but it is not returned on her part. This understanding, for Ernie, is intolerable.

# **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 5**

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 5 Summary**

Ernie's emotional hurt is worse than the physical beating. Ernie seeks solace by the river where he finds a ladybug. He examines her minutely, much as he did the fly three years earlier. This time, though, instead of releasing her, he pulverizes the ladybug between his thumb and forefinger. He begins killing and eating dozens of insects, running and becoming more crazed with each death. He lies down, staring at the sky and thinks that he is smaller than the insects, and he had aspired to be a Just Man. He cannot be a Just Man, he is simply a nothing. And for that, there is no reason to live, for God is no longer there and cannot or will not hear him.

Trudging home, Ernie's mood only darkens further. He contemplates hanging himself or jumping to his death from the roof. He has silently said his goodbyes to everyone important to him. There is no room for thoughts of the Just Men. There is only Ernie, who slices his wrist and watches the blood drain from his body. He hears Ilse's mocking applause so he climbs through the tiny window and falls.

## **Chapter 5, Herr Kremer and Fraulein Ilse, Part 5 Analysis**

The author takes us inside the thoughts of a boy who is losing his mind. Most authors stay outside the character and show his actions, but Andre Schwarz-Bart enters Ernie's mind, taking his readers with him through the strange and terrifying journey of a boy who is experiencing despair. Despair is the belief that God is no longer present, and in most religions this despairing belief is a sin, for to despair means that there is no purpose to life. With despair comes the idea of taking one's own life, and this is what Ernie does with exquisite consideration for each method he considers, first hanging, then jumping from the roof, then bleeding to death and finally a fall from the bathroom window. Ernie is the Jewish people who have seen suffering repeatedly and accept more and more, only to be treated with hostility, resentment, hatred and intolerance, over and over again. Ernie is no longer able to stand it, for his beloved, Ilse, has abandoned him. Perhaps the Jewish people feel that their God has abandoned them as well. Ernie's period of madness in the meadow where he grinds the many insects into dust is representative of Germany annihilating the Jews who are just as peaceable and just as innocent as the insects that Ernie kills. The symbolism is in that the insects are ground to dust, which is all that is left of the holocaust victims, dust. The resulting despair could be the result of Ernie taking on the suffering of the Jews who are even

now being killed. The fact that Ernie requires four different methods to try to take his life indicates that a Just Man really is not able to kill himself, not for self-serving reasons.

# Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 1

## Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 1 Summary

Jewish suicide is rare. It takes two years for Ernie to recover because Mordecai heard him fall and found him immediately. Ernie's believes he is no longer looking through the eyes of his soul, eyes that have been deceitful. The beauty he had once seen is gone, and Ernie realizes that this is his new truth. He refuses to speak, but feels some understanding of the Jewish situation and even Ilse's responses that fateful day. His family is joyous when he speaks, but Ernie dreads he is just returning to his former way of living, which to him is a farce.

Ernie takes up boxing and practices in secret. He teaches himself as well as can, but his first actual fight takes him by surprise, having not had a live opponent before. Ernie wins his first battle, but soon realizes that the boys he fights are stuck by their own upbringing; he cannot hate them, and therefore cannot fight them.

## Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 1 Analysis

Ernie's body is restored to life, but his spirit is dead. He feels old and wise compared to his family and knows that they are just innocent babes, not aware of the real dangers of the world. He tries to use boxing as a personal way to hold back the wave of evil, but there is still a tender, compassionate part of Ernie's soul that will not allow him to be the aggressor. When he thinks of Ilse, he sees her as a lost soul, who is also unaware of the danger. It is here that the true nature of the Lamed-Vovnik overtakes Ernie and he is unaware of it. His soul is being encased in a shell of ice, and God will have to work for many years to thaw him. Ernie has begun to take on the sufferings of the world, without thought to his previously perceived glory of the station.

## **Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 2**

### **Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 2 Summary**

On November 6, 1938, a Jewish boy kills the First Secretary at the German embassy in return for the deportation of his parents. That afternoon, the first Nazi hunters arrive in Stillenstadt. Four days later, the Levy family barricades themselves in the upper room as the steets are ablaze. Someone demands their religious books and Mordecai refuses, claiming that they would prefer to give up their lives rather than give up their religious books.

### **Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 2 Analysis**

This is a moment of tremendous fear, for the Germans are now invading homes and businesses. The new order of Germany is upon them and the Levys are not quite so innocent as before, but still blinded. Because of the little children, most of them believe that God will still intercede for them. The fallacy of their thoughts, however, still lives with them, broken, battered, but alive. If God intends to spare life because of innocence, God would have taken Ernie Levy into the palms of His hands and sheltered him, a soul as pure and compassionate as there ever was. Ernie's experience should have been adequate warning for the Levy family, but they are victims of perpetual hope.

## Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 3

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 3 Summary

The next day, November 11, 1938, over ten thousand Jews at Buchenwald are asked to put their name on a piece of paper and place it in their mouth if they wish to commit suicide. The Levy family begins their exodus only to find no one will open their borders. Finally the Levys arrive in France and find peace and order. They muse about what their life would have been like if Benjamin had moved to France instead of Germany many years ago. The family is not longer hungry every day. War is declared and the Levys are viewed with suspicion and fear. To protect his family, Ernie signs up with the French military as a stretcher-bearer. Ernie never sees his family again. He leaves them a letter and say how much he loves them. He pretends that joining the French military is all a mistake, but one he cannot undo. He includes the eight certificates for each of his family members to prove that they have a relative in the French Army.

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 3 Analysis

Ernie's character is still true to his nature. While he could, he protected his family simply by providing for them with his job. Once war breaks out in Europe, he believes that his best course of action is to join the French Army as a stretcher-bearer. This is a post that does not require the use of a gun, so he is not violating his pacifist beliefs, but by joining he does receive eight certificates proving that the bearer has a relative in the French Army. Ernie believes that this act will protect his family; it is the very best he can do. His suffering increases because of the parting, but Ernie does not know that it will be forever. The sufferings of the Lamed-Vovnik continue.

## Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 4

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 4 Summary

In May of 1940, Ernie a former neighbor informs Ernie that his family is in Gurs. Benjamin writes that the interment camp is horrible and that to be a Jew is difficult. From his father, these were very strong words. Ernie's captain is suspicious of the letter since it is written in Hebrew. Ernie chooses to leave the Army. He tries to persuade the only other Jew to join him, but the man is killed from an artillery assault. The French Army surrenders and gives half of France to Germany. Ernie learns that all internees of Gurs are deported to Nazi extermination camps. Ernie's mind bordered on madness before, but this now is the proverbial straw.

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 4 Analysis

The Lamed-Vovnik works hard to keep his word to the French Army despite word that his family has been detained at Gurs. Then his captain worries that because his family has been detained, it might not be appropriate to have the relative of a detainee as an active military member and makes an attempt to get someone to give him an answer. The bureaucracy of the French Army ensures that Ernie will get the answer he deserves. The answer he gets is the bomb that kills the only other Jew in the company; the surrender of the French Army to Germany; the ceding of half of France to the victor, and the news that his beloved family has been sent from the detainment camp to the death camps of the Nazis. All of his efforts to protect his family have been in vain, and Ernie embarks on his next experience of trying to leave the reality of this crazy world.



## Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 5

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 5 Summary

Ernie's "madness" stems from his permanent separation from his family. He wishes to spit in God's face. Ernie takes it upon himself to study the dog. He changes his name to Bastard, grows a mustache that gives him the look of a poodle, and rather than walking with the meek and humble Jewish shuffle, he springs about with a vigor and friskiness that is more alien to a Polish Jew than wings on a mouse. Three months after he morphs into a dog, he meets M. Mario, who, seeing the scar on his wrist, identifies with him because he shares that same mark. Ernie attempts to both please his new friend and stay true to his new canine nature. The friends of M. Mario believe that he is being silly when he runs around on all fours and barks. Ernie touches the waitress, Melanie on the cheek, and feels, suddenly, as if his fingers were on fire.

Ernie finds work with M. Mario and discovers a peculiar taste for bloody meat, a decidedly un-Jewish trait. The feeling of Melanie's cheek still with him, Ernie seeks a streetwalker, but changes his mind, so both tell lies about their lives. Ernie keeps thinking he is in love with every woman he sees. Ernie stops eating raw meat and fears he is losing his capacity to be a canine and decides to leave the city.

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 5 Analysis

The gentle spirit of Ernie Levy is devastated with his isolation from God and from the permanent separation from his family. The Lamed-Vovnik is suffering beyond the endurance of a regular human being, and to cope, Ernie decides to become a dog, studying the creature's habits so he can be the best canine possible. By being a dog, Ernie does not have to cope with the crushing sorrow that the loss of his family entails, especially since he sacrifices so much to try to keep them safe. He seeks to escape humanity by becoming an animal, looking only to fill his physical needs. The symbolism is that the world has turned into a place of bestiality, where humans are no longer in charge of their society, but animals are. The only way that Ernie can continue to live in the world is to release himself from humanity and become one of the animals like those in charge of Germany. But, Ernie does not figure that the hand of God would bring him back around to the miracle of human touch— a pinch on the cheek by Melanie, the waitress. Then Ernie seeks the company of a prostitute, and suddenly he is overwhelmed by the need to be close to another human being, and he is afraid. Again, Ernie knows that to survive he must protect his mind from further sorrow because he knows that he really can stand no more. This is a true symptom of a Lamed-Vovnik.

## Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 6

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 6 Summary

In the winter of 1942 Ernie goes to find farm work in the Rhone valley. He had come close to returning to humanity so works even harder at his canine identity. His outside appearance degrades. He discovers a small farm run by a woman whose husband is a prisoner. Ernie is happy to do as the woman asks. He shares her bed, returns to eating raw meat, drinking cold drink, and the woman asks nothing more of him. Ernie expresses fear that sharing her bed would offend her husband. What she does not know for a fact is that Ernie is a Jew, but when she learns Ernie is a Jew, she is angry because she feels Ernie lied to her. Ernie makes a bed in the barn. Life continues on as before, only their mating is now done in the barn.

One Sunday Ernie goes into town and attends Mass, still pretending not to be a Jew. The village blacksmith seems to recognize Ernie, which frightens Ernie. Ernie confronts the blacksmith, who denies knowing Ernie, but he does know that Ernie is Jewish because Ernie has the same desperate, black eyes of Jewish children wearing their enormous yellow Jewish stars on a train. That the blacksmith recognizes Ernie from his eyes is the sign that Ernie needs to return to life. He says goodbye to the farm wife, who sees in his eyes the difference in him. Ernie strikes his face with a rock cutting his cheek. He lies on the ground crying, his tears running into the earth, tears that had dried up when Ilse had applauded him after the attack of Hans and his cohorts.

### Chapter 6, The Dog, Part 6 Analysis

The Just Man's suffering continues unabated, and he finds solace in the arms of a farm woman who can take care of his physical needs but poses no risks to his emotional condition. Life continues in this manner, Ernie eating raw meat, drinking cold drink, bedding a woman not his wife, living the life of a dog, not thinking about tomorrow or where even the next meal will come from. This ends when Ernie is recognized as a Jew by a compassionate Catholic man who knows Ernie by his eyes, the same eyes the blacksmith sees peering from the windows of the German evacuation buses. Believing that to escape life, all he had to do was turn himself into a dog, and for the most part Ernie succeeded, but he did not reckon in the burning passion still radiating forth from his eyes. This is the sign that he needs. Ernie feels himself die the death of the dog, the animal, and come to life as a human again.

# Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy

## Part 1

### Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 1 Summary

He returns to find out if the Association still has any members. He had attended Association meetings with his Mordecai. This is how Ernie tries to reestablish some sort of connection with his former self. Ernie finds four emaciated old Jewish men, meek, gentle, and courteous. The four men initially believe Ernie is there to arrest them, but their reaction when Ernie reveals his identity is equivalent to that of the father to the prodigal son. Their greatest joy is to find a member of the Levy family alive. When they realize Ernie is the boy Mordecai spoke about, the one he believed to be a true Just Man, their joy knows no bounds.

They wish to know why Ernie has come back and Ernie admits he does not know. The men try to convince Ernie pretend he is not Jewish, but Ernie wants to be on a true path. The four submit themselves to Ernie as judge over them and Ernie calls them the four patriarchs, which tickles them immensely. They say it is further proof of his identity as a Levy—a Levy's most renowned characteristic is gentleness. Ernie allows his name to be filled in next to Mordecai in the Association's archive book. Ernie finally feels a little bit of peace.

### Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 1 Analysis

Ernie's discovery of the four patriarchs at the old Association office gives him the final tie he needs to reconnect to his past. Through the discussion with the old men, the reader is given a very strong clue that Ernie is not simply a Just Man, but one of the Inconsolable Just, one who endures the sufferings of humanity so profoundly that he can almost not endure to live. The proof of this lies in the three episodes of Ernie's descent into madness, each episode is unique and strange. These periods in Ernie's life were the only way he could endure not only his own suffering but that of the world around him.

# **Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy**

## **Part 2**

### **Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 2 Summary**

The old Jewish men never tire of speaking of their God and this amazes Ernie. Ernie goes to synagogue at every opportunity, though fewer members are present, but it's never empty. Raids happen every day in Paris, and the lifespan of a Jew in the city is very short. Ernie returns home to find a German notice and the four men now gone. Ernie waits for them to come for him. Finally, he realizes that he is still free for the time being.

One day at synagogue he sees two French men sexually harassing a red-headed Jewish girl. Ernie takes out her two attackers and the two run down numerous alleyways to get away. She thanks him in Yiddish and Ernie says he hopes he did not push her too hard because she is lame. Golda laughs, making fun of her leg; she has the joy of God in her heart. Ernie escorts her home and asks if he can come again. Golda is shocked but pleased. Ernie feels the first twinges of happiness.

### **Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 2 Analysis**

The men of the Association make it very clear to Ernie that a Jew's lifespan in Paris is very short, and they expect every day to be taken away. However, until that happens they live life fully, going to synagogue whenever they can and speaking of God all the time. This brings Ernie back to his past, a connection he thought he would never have again. They only have a few days together before Ernie comes home to find them gone and their bags gone as well. Had Ernie delayed his return to Paris by that many days, he would have lost the opportunity to talk to men who knew and respected his grandfather and who revere him because of his position. The next sign from God that life is not yet over is when Ernie is compelled to rescue Golda and finds himself really falling in love with her, not just looking for physical satisfaction. This is as close to happiness Ernie has been since before that fateful day in Stillenstadt when Ilse watched Hans' gang beat him up.

# Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy

## Part 3

### Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 3 Summary

Golda has learned the value of living in the present, and not regretting anything or worrying about the future. Her leg was injured when they were in exodus. She and Ernie spend much time together, talking of all sorts of things, often about why people hate the Jews. Ernie says Jesus was a Hasid Jew, just as Golda's father and thinks Golda's father and Jesus would have been friends. Ernie believes Golda to be wiser than a rabbi while he has no idea of true suffering. Ernie wants to prove his love for Golda, but all she wants is readily available. She wants to walk around Paris without their stars on, which Ernie is happy to do. They enjoy the out of doors, and Ernie treats Golda to an ice cream, something she has never tasted before.

Golda shows her first sign of fear for the future by saying they are condemned. Golda asks if they are engaged and says she wishes to be his wife this day. Ernie is bitter saying that finding a rabbi is going to be difficult. Golda has no desire for a rabbi; she wishes to be Ernie's wife, before God, right then. Ernie tries to confess his sins to Golda, but she shushes him by telling him that she knows who he is and asks him to kiss her. Ernie is afraid that all his scars will frighten her, but she tells him that he is as handsome as King David.

### Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 3 Analysis

Golda is a girl who is wise beyond her years. Before meeting Ernie she has no desire to find a husband; she was perfectly happy with her parents. After meeting Ernie, she realizes that she wants to know him intimately, and that their time together is very short. After a day of forbidden pleasure with both of them walking around Paris without their yellow stars, they go to Ernie's apartment where Golda implores him to make her his wife that day. She fears that they may not have tomorrow. The two of them, before the eyes of the God, who Ernie is still trying to believe in again, consummate their marriage.

# Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy

## Part 4

### Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 4 Summary

After their "marriage," and Ernie walks Golda back to her apartment, he returns to his apartment, sleeps deeply and awakens to find bits of Golda's hair. He is happy and all day at work thinks about their future. Ernie decides that they will live and love for as long as they can. Golda does not appear at his workplace by noon, and Ernie runs to her apartment. He sees the German notice on Golda's door. The concierge tosses him Golda's harmonica that one of the soldiers stomped on. Golda had begged the concierge to give it to "the young man." Ernie is not going to sit and wait for the hand of God to deal the next round. He travels to Drancy, a name that puts chills in the hearts of children. Ernie contemplates the beautiful blue sky over Drancy and wonders why it is as sweet as it is anywhere else and yet the amount of pain and suffering being experienced by the Jews there is ongoing. Ernie requests entry at the gate, and they laugh at him. Ernie is finally brought into the camp and beaten senseless by the guards trying to discover his real reason for wanting entry into the camp.

### Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 4 Analysis

One night of happiness and then the glorious God of the Jews strips Ernie has Golda and her family taken to Drancy that very night after Ernie takes her home. Unaware, initially, of her plight, Ernie dreams at work of what future they may have together, a few months, a few weeks, even a few days seem so sweet to him. Upon discovering that Golda has been taken Ernie secures entrance into the Drancy concentration camp but is beaten senseless on suspicion that he is carrying secrets to one of the prisoners. Beaten and conquered physically, Ernie never divulges just who it is he seeks at Drancy.

# **Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 5**

## **Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 5 Summary**

Ernie comes to, believing he is back in the hospital at Mainz where he recuperated after his suicide attempt. He loses consciousness again as he hears trumpets of joy sounding. Ernie dreams of a real wedding with Golda. Much of the dream is symbolic, with blood tears, a butterfly, and dove. He is not certain at first if the bride is Ilse or Golda, but then sees she is Golda. He wakes from that dream and then has a dream/vision of him running near Stillenstadt, naked with his skin stripped from his body. His vision takes him back to Drancy and sees his whole family, including Golda. He is in horrific pain and grief. He has had a foretaste of loss and death.

## **Chapter 7, The Marriage of Ernie Levy Part 5 Analysis**

The wedding of Ernie and Golda is a vision of Ernie's, brought on by his delirium from the pain of his most recent beating, but also from the emotional pain of being separated from Golda, his "wife." The suffering Ernie endures throughout the wedding ceremony is reflective of all the pains he has endured throughout his life, but the one of the separation from Golda gives him the clearest understanding of what it really means to die. The entire passage is full of symbolism and is a metaphor of Ernie's life, quite possibly the most difficult portion of the book to read.

# Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 1

## Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 1 Summary

Drancy is a holding point, a way station for the innocents to be stored until their time for slaughter. Ernie is named Gribouille, meaning simpleton, since he voluntarily enters the camp. He finds Golda, who has lost her spark. He asks her for a forbidden desire and if she is hungry. He runs back to his dormitory and begs a piece of candy from the men. One man produces a couple pieces of moldy sugar. When Ernie returns to Golda she has been transformed by the women. She is told of Gribouille and says that she did not know that he and Ernie were the same person. When she asks Ernie if he really tried to get into the camp because of her, he denies it, he does not want her to bear that burden.

The camp has an influx of children and one or two additional buses of adults. Ernie discovers Golda is to leave on the next train and gets his name on the same list, so they will be together. Ernie and Golda try to quiet the many terrified children. They are loaded onto the train, and even Ernie, calm as he has been throughout the entire ordeal finds himself screaming for help when they close the doors of the train.

## Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 1 Analysis

Ernie's vision of his wedding to Golda proves to him that he must not be separated from his wife, and he uses every trick up his sleeve, everything in his power to find her. Once he does, he refuses to be parted from her, seeking even to be on the same train to the Pichipoi death camp to be with her. Ernie's sufferings in life have prepared him to do what it takes to hold on to the hand of love and joy while there is still time in this life to do so. He comforts others who are with them, especially the innocent children who are terrified. Knowing that his family has already tread this path before him, he understands that he is now in one of the lower levels of the hell his family endured, and he is determined not to be left behind.



## Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 2

### Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 2 Summary

Ernie learns she had been crying in his sleep on the train. Golda is frustrated that she must share Ernie with the children. Ernie reassures her of his love for her, that she is worth more to him than bread, water, salt, fire, even life. The children derive comfort from his word and Ernie realizes that he is needed. An old woman doctor tells Ernie that the child is dead and Ernie says loudly that the boy is only asleep. A little girl tells Ernie that the newly-dead boy is her brother, and Ernie tells her they are going to the Kingdom of Israel where all the children will find their families, and there will be happiness. Everyone on the train listens to Ernie's words hoping that they are true, and they do indeed bring comfort to them, although the doctor is angry. Ernie tells the doctor that there is no room for the truth on this train.

### Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 2 Analysis

This is the part of the story where the true nature of the Lamed-Vovnik becomes known. Ernie is so removed from his belief in God that it very well may take a thousand years to warm him enough to greet God. What Ernie does know is that to be separated from those you love is the greatest pain next to death, and as he has lost the opportunity to die with his family, he will not lose the opportunity to die with Golda. On the train he realizes that the terror and fear of their fate is turning the gentle Jewish people into animals. The ones he especially pities are the children, most of whom are there without their parents, and this new, frightening adult world is something for which they have never been prepared. He knows that the words of their scriptures will bring comfort, and the words of the Kingdom of Israel will at least allay their fears; there will be a lessening in their terror, and because of that he is willing to pretend a belief he no longer feels. Had Ernie not been a Lamed-Vovnik, he would not have even been on that train, nor would he have even followed Golda to the concentration camp.

## Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 3

### Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 3 Summary

The fourth night finds most resigned and empty. Ernie holds Golda and wakes to discover he is covered with children. Ernie is unable to say any words of comfort. The train comes to a halt and the prisoners are ordered out of the train. Ernie realizes hope is gone as he sees all the abandoned possessions. Golda tells him in amazement that he is weeping blood. Ernie says his tears are not blood. The prisoners are being separated, the stronger men to one side, the women, children and invalids to the other. Golda retreats into herself, telling Ernie that they will be separated. Even the children look with pleading in their eyes that he will not abandon them. Ernie assures Golda and the children they will not be separated—they will go to the Kingdom of Israel together. With these words Ernie weeps more tears of blood. His words are the only things that can sooth the stark terror.

### Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 3 Analysis

The final leg of the train journey shows Ernie and Golda still embraced together, and Ernie loving Golda even if the light in her that caused him to love her is gone. There is a lesson in his dedication to her— that loving is a choice, and he chooses to love her, despite her looks or her loss of hope and joy. He promises her that he will stay with her; after all, he has promised himself that he would not desert her— that they would die together. When he repeats that promise to the children his eyes weep blood, the last sign necessary to prove his status as a Lamed-Vovnik.

## Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 4

### Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 4 Summary

They are told that the able-bodied men are needed to build houses and that the rest will be allowed to rest while waiting for their assignments. Golda believes the tale, much to Ernie's relief. They are told they must use the bath houses, taking only their papers and valuables, and just what they need to wash themselves. The prisoners are told to note the hook number used for their clothing. Golda asks Ernie not to look at her naked, so he closes his eyes to preserve her modesty, while the children hold onto Ernie's naked thighs as they are directed into the bath house. They are told that they need the baths and inhalations to prevent the spread of disease. The lights are extinguished, and terror breaks out. Ernie gently shouts to the children to breath deeply and quickly. Golda is fading from him and her last question to him is whether she will ever see him again, and Ernie promises that they will be together in a little while. As he dies, Ernie remembers the words of Mordecai from the legend of Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion and repeats them as he embraces Golda, his love. The story does not end here, it is repeated at Auschwitz, Maidanek, Treblinka, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Belzec, Sobibor, Chelmno, Pnoary, Theresienstadt, Warsaw, Vilvna, Skarzysko, Bergen-Belsen, Janow, Dora, Neuengamme, Pustkow.

### Chapter 8, Never Again, Part 4 Analysis

Ernie Levy, the Just Man taking on one thirty-sixth of the world's suffering for that generation took upon himself the sufferings of six million Jews, one thirty-sixth of those who perished in his generation. His sufferings included dying a little each time one of God's little angels died; his tears of blood represent the overwhelming torment of his soul, and his love of Golda undying until the end. Ernie loved and sheltered the little ones within his sphere of influence, within his circle, promising to be with them as they entered the Kingdom of Israel, and he kept his promise. That kept promise is what saved his sanity—before he was trying to save himself— this time he lost himself trying to save the souls of innocents.

# Characters

## Ernie Levy

Ernie Levy - the last Just Man of the Levy family, a family whose tradition in the Lamed-Vovnik legend began in 1185 in York, England. Ernie is the son of Benjamin Levy and Fraulein Blumenthal. He is the grandson of Mordecai Levy, the patriarch, and Judith Levy, also called Mother Judith. Ernie is brought up in a deeply-devout Jewish family headed by his grandfather, Mordecai. Ernie is given indications from Mordecai that he may be one of the legendary Just Men of the Levy family, and from the time he is a little boy, Ernie looks at the world through his soul, seeing his family exactly as they are—sad, frightened, loving people who are simply trying to follow the law of their God in a very confusing world.

Initially Ernie believes that he can train himself to toughen up for his position by holding his breath and burning his hand, so that he will not feel pain when he is martyred. Mordecai intervenes to inform him that as a Just Man he is simply to live, and while he lives he will bear the burden of one thirty-sixth of the world's suffering. Young Ernie is very confused with the legend and the stories of the martyrs among his ancestors. His spirit is kind and sweet and gentle. He never wishes to fight, and even refuses to take the part assigned to him by his Christian friends in the playacting recreation of the death of Jesus.

In school he accepts the torment of his non-Jewish schoolmates until he is attacked by Hans and his gang of Pimpfe and beaten and humiliated in front of Ilse, the Christian girl he admires. That day his life changes. He goes on a rampage in the meadow beside the river Schlosse killing and eating all the insects he can get his hands on. Then he goes home and attempts in four ways to kill himself, but because God will not allow a Just Man to take his life for selfish reasons, Ernie survives. After this event Ernie knows that his family are innocent as babies and it is his job to protect them. When they seek refuge in Paris and war breaks out, Ernie signs on with the French Army in order to give his family proof that they are French enough not to be transported. His effort fails and his entire family perishes in the German death camps of France. With the pain of losing his family, Ernie determines that he will now live life as a dog and for three years he neglects his Jewish faith, eats bloody meat, sleeps with women, and behaves like an animal. When he comes back to himself, Ernie returns to Paris, makes contact with what remains of the Association of his Grandfather's and meets Golda, the girl he really loves. She is taken to a concentration camp the night they declare their love, and Ernie follows her, gaining access into the camp in order to be with his love. They travel together on the train to the death camp where they die in one another's arms. This time Ernie's desire to die is not a selfish one, but one made to give comfort to the woman he loves and to join his family who died before him.

## Mordecai Levy

Mordecai Levy - the patriarch, the elephant, the tree. Mordecai is husband to Judith, father to Benjamin Levy and grandfather to Ernie Levy. It is Mordecai who believes with his entire being the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik and knows that the next Just Man will be born into his family. He makes it his life's work to ensure that the Levy line continues. His disappointment in his son Benjamin follows the tradition of all his ancestors, who deemed less than ideal human specimens as being unworthy of the title of Lamed-Vovnik. As Mordecai ages, his understanding of the Lamed-Vovnik deepens and his sorrow over losing his sons in Zemyock, and having to move to Stillenstadt almost topple the giant man. However, when Ernie is born, Mordecai takes new interest in life and very nearly decides that the legend will be conferred onto Ernie even before any sign of his being a Just Man is demonstrated. Once Mordecai believes he has seen that sign his efforts to indoctrinate Ernie into the role of the Lamed-Vovnik intensify. Mordecai does have the understanding that the Just Man can do nothing to change the course of life, just that he is to endure the suffering of his fellow man. This is the part of the lesson of the legend he fails to make clear to Ernie. Mordecai remains the patriarch of the Levy family all the way to the concentration camp. His faith, while tested often, never wavers, and his belief in Ernie is complete and absolute. He even goes so far as to tell The Association that his grandson, Ernie, is not simply a Just Man, but one of the Inconsolable Just Men, a true Unknown, whom even God would hesitate to touch.

## Judith Levy

Mother Judith - wife of Mordecai Levy, mother to Benjamin Levy, and grandmother to the Just Man, Ernie Levy. Judith is both unusual and yet typical for a Jewish woman. She is a very strong woman, who knows her mind. She is tricked by Mordecai into thinking that he is a Just Man, though she falls in love with him without knowing that. She, instead, would prefer not to be married into a family of Just Men, but once she is, she adopts their legend as hers and cloaks herself with the identity of the Lamed-Vovnik of the Levy line. She is a no nonsense woman who takes over her son's household, allowing her daughter-in-law to give birth to her grandchildren and possibly nurse them, but once they no longer have a physical need of their mother, Mother Judith takes over their care.

## Benjamin Levy

Benjamin Levy - Son of Mordecai and Judith Levy, father to Ernie Levy. Benjamin is the first born, living son of Mordecai and Judith, but is so small at his birth that he is called a Mosquito and considered inconsequential. After the pogrom that kills his three other brothers, Benjamin is now seen by Mordecai as the only way a Just Man of the Levy line can continue. Benjamin leaves Zemyock, travels first to Berlin and then to Stillenstadt, where the Levys live for many years. Benjamin has little belief in the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik and is disconcerted when Ernie shows any sign of strangeness.



## **Fraulein Blumenthal**

Fraulein Blumenthal - wife to Benjamin Levy and the mother of Ernie, Moritz, and Jacob as well as the rest of Ernie's brothers and sisters. Fraulein Blumenthal is never called by any other name as she is only needed to be the vessel for the next Just Man. Even in the days when trouble against the Jews start, she is excused from the room by being told that the conversation is only for the adults.

## **Moritz Levy**

Moritz Levy - Ernie's older brother, who is called a pagan and a heathen from his early days of joining the street gangs of Stillenstadt, none of whom are Jewish. Moritz is a more realistic Jew, hard-hearted and angry at the way Jews are treated. He fights frequently.

## **Jacob Levy**

Jacob Levy - Ernie's little brother, who he protects on the way to the synagogue the day of the first Nazi patrol attack at the synagogue. Jacob also requires Ernie's assistance on at least one other occasion when Ernie is able to use his new boxing technique to beat an opponent.

## **Yankel**

Yankel the Galician - Yankel is the Jew Benjamin meets in Berlin in the homeless shelter in the synagogue. Yankel is hard and bitter, a Jew who has lost his way, but Yankel sees that Benjamin is a good Jew, loving, kind and peaceful, and tells Benjamin that he has no business living in Berlin—that he should go home. To help Benjamin leave Berlin, Yankel gives him a great deal of money so that Benjamin can start a new life in Stillenstadt.

## **Ilse Bruckner**

Ilse Bruckner - the beautiful, little Christian girl Ernie has always admired. His first encounter with her is when they are re-enacting the Passion of Christ, and they cast Ernie as the people who kill their Lord. Three years later they are put together again at Herr Kremer's home in an attempt to give them equal social footing. Ilse accepts Ernie's love and devotion, but feels nothing for him. She stands and watches dispassionately when Hans and his gang attack Ernie on that fateful day when Ernie decides he has to commit suicide.



## **Hans Schlielmann**

Hans Schlielmann - Ilse Bruckner's cousin who is the leader of the gang of Pimpfe, the precursor to the Hitler Youth, at Ernie's school. Hans delights in degrading and humiliating the Jewish children, usually leading the campaigns of torment on the playground. He is also responsible for Ernie's attempt at suicide.

## **Herr Kremer**

Herr Kremer - Ernie's gentle teacher at school, who does not understand nor agrees with the policies of Fascism. He used to think that Fascism was a fad and would soon pass, but instead, when it gives rise to the Nazi organization, his acceptance of government wanes. He does what little he can to protect the Jewish children in his school as well as trying to bring peace to the world by attempting to unite one Jewish boy and one Christian girl on a social level. He fails abysmally and is replaced at school.

## **Herr Geer**

Herr Geer - the German teacher who replaces Herr Kremer in Ernie's school. He is a vicious, mean little man, who delights in torturing the Jewish students and humiliating them. He believes that is the way they deserve to be treated. His job is to prepare the Aryan students for their role in the new Fatherland under Adolf Hitler.

## **Blacksmith**

The blacksmith - the Catholic who spies Ernie during Mass during his time as a dog and recognizes that he is Jewish because of his eyes. The encounter with the blacksmith is what starts Ernie's conversion back to humanity.

## **Mme. Trochu**

Mme. Trochu - the farmer's wife, whose bed Ernie shares during the time he behaves as if he is a dog.

## **The Four Gentlemen of the Association**

The Four Gentlemen of the Association - the four skinny, old Jewish men Ernie finds at the Association office in Paris and the last link to his family and Zemyock. Ernie accompanies Mordecai to the association meetings during the time he spends with his family in Paris. The four gentlemen help return Ernie to God by taking him to synagogue and forever talking of God.



## **Golda Engelbaum**

Golda Engelbaum - the beautiful and joy-filled Jewish girl who Ernie falls in love with in Paris during the occupation. She is removed to the concentration camp the very night they declare their love for one another. She joins Ernie on the death train to their final stop at Pichipoi, where they die in one another's arms.

## **Gribouille**

Gribouille - the name Ernie is given in the concentration camp. It means simpleton, which is what everyone thought of him for requesting to be admitted to a concentration camp.

## **Rabbi Yom Tom Levy**

Rabbi Yom Tom Levy - the rabbi in 1185, who guides his people to God rather than submit to forced Christian baptism.

## **Solomon Levy**

Solomon Levy - the son of Yom Tom Levy, and the first Just Man of the Levys. He dies for pronouncing the Messiah to be a fake as there is still suffering in the world.

## **Mannassah Levy**

Manassah Levy - son of Solomon.

## **Israel Levy**

Israel Levy - son of Manassah.

## **Mattathias Levy**

Mattathias Levy - son of Israel, more closely accorded to the devil than to God.

## **Joachim Levy**

Joachim Levy - son of Mattathias.





## **Chaim Levy**

Chaim Levy - son of Joachim, separated from his parents and raised in a convent and becomes a priest.

## **Ephraim Levy**

Ephraim Levy - son of Chaim.

## **Jonathan Levy**

Jonathan Levy - son of Ephraim.

## **Nehemiah Levy**

Nehemiah Levy - son of Jonathan.

## **Jacob Levy**

Jacob Levy - son of Nehemiah.

## **Chaim Levy**

Chaim Levy - son of Jacob, the first Levy of Zemyock giving rise to the first Just Man of Zemyock



# **Objects/Places**

## **Zemyock, Poland**

Zemyock is the town in Poland where a number of the Just Men lived.

## **Berlin, Germany**

Berlin is a big noisy city, where Benjamin chooses to exile himself after leaving Zemyock.

## **Stillenstadt, Germany**

Stillenstadt, in contrast to Berlin, is a quiet, tranquil town where Jews live as Jews, and there is room for Benjamin Levy to make a home and a living.

## **Jewish Faith**

The guiding force for all Jewish people, helping them to determine how to live their life with the end of joining God in the Kingdom of Israel.

## **The Just Man - Lamed-Vovnik**

The Legend that embodies the belief that there are thirty-six men in every generation who bear the suffering of all of humankind. Each just man of a generation endures one thirty-sixth of all that pain.

## **Yellow Jewish Star**

The outward sign that all Jews, adults and children alike, are required to wear as mandated by the German government to more easily identify the enemies of the world.

## **Second Floor room**

The room where Ernie starts the process of his suicide.

## **Synagogue**

The religious home of the Jewish people, a place of worship that continues to draw the Jews even when it becomes dangerous to openly worship.



## **Riggenstrasse**

The road the Levy's home was on in Stillenstadt.

## **Herr Kremer's Apartment**

A place where Herr Kremer attempted to encourage acceptance between Ernie and Ilse, a Jew and a Christian.

## **School**

A place of education that changes under German rule to become a place where children are trained either to murder or commit suicide.

## **Schlosse**

The river in Stillenstadt where Ernie meets Ilse, and then the scene where he murders hundreds of insects after his humiliation in front of Ilse.

## **Fly - First Episode**

In the alfalfa field when Ernie runs away from home, Ernie understands that he must be so humble, so small to be a Just Man. He determines that he will be the Just Man of the flies if he is not big enough, strong enough, or important enough to be the Just Man for humankind.

## **Fly - Second Episode**

In Herr Kremer's apartment, Ernie rescues a fly from a puddle of milk, dries it off and allows it to use the heat from the oven to fly to the ceiling.

## **Ladybug - The Insects**

His first victim on his murderous rampage that mirrors the German murderous rampage of the Jewish nation, who is as innocent and peaceful as the insects by the river.

## **Mainz Hospital**

Where Ernie recovers after his suicide attempt.



## **Paris, France**

The place of refuge for the Levy family when German becomes too dangerous for a Jewish family.

## **The Association**

The group of Jewish people in Paris who used to live in Zemyock.

## **429th Foreign Infantry Regiment**

The unit Ernie is assigned to as a stretcher carrier when he joins the French Army.

## **Farm - St. Sylvestre**

The farm where Ernie lives for three years as a dog.

## **Old Quarter of Marais**

The old rundown part of Paris where the Jews found refuge for a short time.

## **Drancy Concentration Camp**

The concentration camp where Golda and her parents are sent.

## **Moldy Sugar and Candy**

A symbol of the greatest gift in the world, given by a concentration camp inmate who has nothing else to give, to Ernie who wishes to give a gift to Golda.

## **Hitler Doll**

The doll in the Levy second floor room that is hung by Moritz and his friends. It is designated Hitler by two crayon marks on the upper lip.

## **The Death Train**

The train that takes Ernie, Golda and many children to Pichipoi Death camp. Many children die on the train, many others are comforted by the Just Man in their midst.

## **Pichipoi**

The death camp in France where Ernie and Golda die together.

## **The Bath house**

The building where the invalids, women, and children are sent to bathe and take an inhalation in order to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. It is really where the Germans gas thousands of Jews to death before burning them to hide the evidence.

# Themes

## The Hypocrisy of Fascism, Nazi Barbarism and the Jewish Nation

When Fascist Germany first introduced the idea of an Aryan nation, they targeted the dark-haired, dark-eyed Jewish people as their first victims. After all, they were a non-Christian people, and everyone knows that non-Christians are barbarians. With that propaganda being spread, and tales of the rising up of the Jewish nation, all the people of Europe began to view their quiet, peaceful Jewish neighbors with doubt, skepticism, and finally fear. If the government of Germany says they are dangerous, then it must be true.

The German authorities know that in order to change the people, they must reach the children. German schools, even the ones who still accept the attendance of Jewish students, hire teachers whose credentials are focused on cruelty, intolerance, punishment, and discipline. It becomes their job to teach Aryan and Jewish children alike that the world is not fair, that the Jewish children are dogs and are to be servile to their Aryan brothers and sisters. In the story, Herr Geer paints a horrific picture of how much freedom the teachers are given when it comes to handling the children in their care. Herr Geer is vicious even toward the German youth, but when it comes to handling the Jewish children, his hatred knows no bounds, his indoctrination into the beliefs of Nazi Germany preclude him from even attempting to understand why Ernie Levy presents himself, arm behind his back, for punishment without protest. Herr Geer is humiliated and triumphant at the same time and he blames Ernie for that confusion. So it is with all the German Nazis and the Jewish people.

Germany's hypocrisy is clearly drawn with the excellence with which they invent their method of gathering up, transporting, and exterminating the Jewish people by the millions. They are also killing the non-Christian "barbarians" who refuse to pick up the sword or the gun. This behavior begs the question as to who the true barbarians really are.

## The Question of Religious Intolerance

The theme in the Last of the Just on Religious Intolerance explores what happens to men when they work very hard to do what is right in their eyes and coming against other men who have very different ideas of the right thing to do. The story begins with the 12th-century story of Rabbi Yom Tov Levy whose people are pursued into a watchtower to avoid being murdered by a Christian mob, who wishes to convert the Jewish pagans to their religion. Rather than being forced to convert to Christianity, Rabbi Levy instructs his people to take their own lives and give them to God themselves, with one survivor remaining to carry on the tradition and the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik. This is the first



example in the book of the demand that the Jews give up something that is an innate part of themselves to satisfy the Christian community.

The very injustice of prejudice against a people due to their religious beliefs is puzzling to the Jewish people. Their way of life is one of peace, meekness, compassion, and devoutness. They are a people devoted to family and religion, tradition, and legend. As their forefathers before them, they believe that any suffering they endure is for the greater glory of God. Their history teaches them that there is manifestation of evil, but that if they live a good and devout life, they will be protected from it most of the time. Their constant question is "why it is so difficult for Jews and Christians to live together?"

The idea of the Lamed-Vovnik legend gives the Jewish people something to hope for as they wait for the coming of their Messiah, who will deliver them to the Kingdom of Israel. The records of the twentieth century give a much more detailed accounting of the sufferings of the Jewish people than in previous centuries. The Jewish people are targeted first by the Cossacks of Russia and then by the Nazis of Germany. Their only sin is the matter of their religion, a religion that prevents them from taking up arms for fear they may kill one of their own Jewish brothers. The fear of the German people that is spread throughout Europe is that the Jews will one day conquer the world, so Germany intends to conquer the Jews first. The final twist is that Germany eschewed many sects of Christianity as well as Judaism, so the disease of religious intolerance spread to intolerance of anyone who is different.

## **The Effect of Following Your Destiny**

Looking at two of the main characters in the book, Mordecai Levy and Ernie Levy, the allegiance of these two men to the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik leads each of them down differing paths. Mordecai grows up in a very traditional Jewish family in Zemyock, Poland, and the religious lessons of his youth permeate his entire life. His belief that living quietly and peacefully, working hard and making no trouble will give him the opportunity to live well among Christians and Jews alike is false. While he is taught at home to be a good Jew, follow the law of God and God will provide, Mordecai learns very quickly that other men do not necessarily find his diligence to his work a good thing because his religion makes him different, and therefore suspect. Mordecai manages to live his life with his belief system intact even despite losing three of his sons in a Cossack pogrom in Zemyock. The legend of the Lamed-Vovnik in the Levy family gives him reason to continue to believe that somehow, somewhere, there is an answer to all their suffering. Mordecai's belief carries him through his entire life, with periods of doubt and fear, but the overall feeling of Mordecai is that his faith is what sustains him.

On the other hand, while Ernie is taught his religion and the tenets of his faith from his grandfather, Mordecai, Ernie's experience is vastly different. Perhaps it is because Mordecai only pretended at one point in his life to be a Just Man in order to win the hand of his wife, Ernie truly is a Just Man, a fact that Mordecai suspects even when the boy is very young. As a result of Mordecai's suspicions, he undertakes more vigorous training of Ernie, and Ernie's young, impressionable mind believes in a very different

destiny. He believes that he has to save the world, and that he must prepare himself for that destiny. His experiences teach him very quickly that one man or one boy cannot make a difference, and if there is a position for a Just Man open, it must only be for a fly, because Ernie debases himself to the point that he does not see any value in his life.

Both men are compassionate, gentle, and devout Jews. Both of them follow the path that God sets in place for them. The biggest difference between the two men is that while Mordecai values, indeed, treasures the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik, he understands the teaching that even a Just Man simply lives his life the best way that he can. Ernie, having the legend of the Lamed-Vovnik placed on him like a yoke sees the world very differently than his grandfather. Combining his tender heart with his new responsibility to save the world, Ernie becomes upset, angry, and despairing that there is even a God who loves his people. Ernie learns to live the life of an unknowing Lamed-Vovnik by turning away from God, and it is perhaps this distance from God that allows him to endure the tremendous suffering that is his.



# Style

## Point of View

The Last of the Just begins with an omniscient narrator, who takes the reader through the first generations of the Just Man. Most generations are covered quickly, giving a little bit of history on the political and religious temperature of the times, explaining why each man is chosen as the Just Men and how it affects their lives.

In Chapter Two, the story revolves around the character, Mordecai Levy, and the point of view changes to third person, interspersed with interjections of the omniscient narrator from time to time. This third person point of view moves from main character to main character depending on whose story it is at the time. The actual story starts with Mordecai, moves to Benjamin's story, back to Mordecai and finally finishes with Ernie, who is essentially the main character. However, without the stories of other important characters such as his grandfather and his father, Ernie's story is meaningless.

Rarely the author will include telling the story from another character's point of view, such as Herr Kremer's story contained in Chapter Five. Herr Kremer is really not considered a main character, but he is the only reliable person to tell certain parts of the story because those parts of the story are based on his understanding of the world and the political situation in which he finds himself. Without his perspective the story would lack the emotional drama contained in Ernie's young life.

The author is very skilled and changes in Point of View are effortless and seamless. When the narrator takes over it is as if the scene expands and moves back so that the reader has a greater view of the scene, and its importance in the reader's understanding of these particular plot points. Without the presence of the omniscient narrator, the story would be much more limited and less universal.

## Setting

The Last of the Just is set in England beginning in the year 1185 and ending in Europe during World War II.

The first chapter of the book runs crazily from the corners of England to Spain, France, Portugal, China, and Poland among others. The first portion of the book moves quickly through several centuries and many countries and gives some details on the lives of the first twelve Just Men of the Levy family.

The story slows down when Chaim reaches the city of Zemyock, Poland, an insulated, even isolated town from the world at large. In fact, Chaim Levy fears that he will actually die in his bed as a Just Man, and this is absolutely unheard of! It is beyond his comprehension that he will not be martyred. It is not until the pogrom of 1915, that the Levy family realizes that there is true hatred in the world. They have endured suffering



and hunger in Zemyock, but for many years they have been safe there. Once that safety has been breached, it is time for some of the Levy family to choose a new destination for exile from Zemyock.

Benjamin Levy exiles himself from quiet Zemyock to Berlin. Berlin is a big, noisy city with many noisy people. The synagogue in which he takes refuge is crowded with many families in the same room, using chalk lines on the floor to designate their "space." There is no privacy, no peace, and much confusion. The transition from Zemyock to Berlin is too great a shock, so Benjamin accepts a monetary gift from Yankel and starts a new life in Stillenstadt, still in Germany. He eventually brings his parents from Zemyock to Stillenstadt to live with him and it is here that Benjamin raises his family. For Benjamin, Stillenstadt is not a place of hunger or want and an ideal a place to settle down.

Once the atrocities of the German government become widely accepted, even wonderful Stillenstadt is now dangerous to the Jewish people and so the setting changes to Paris, France. Again, the initial foray to Paris results in relief for the Levy family, but as a little time passes and following the pattern of previous moves, danger follows the Levy family when war is declared in the fall of 1939. Less than a year later, the Levy family is transported to a concentration camp. Danger continues to follow Ernie Levy, but he dodges some of it during the time that he chooses to live as a dog rather than as a Jew, but he knows that he is not true to himself and must return to Paris while he regains his humanity.

Ernie's return to humanity also brings him closer and closer to the mortal danger that the Levy family has been facing for years. From Paris the setting moves to the concentration camp of Drancy, where Ernie is tortured and beaten again, but life improves because he is reunited with Golda for a short time.

The final settings of the book are on the Death Train and at the Death Camp. They are described in as much of the awful detail even a determined reader can stand, and yet the real truth must be much worse. The wonderful technique that the author uses is to insert a vision of Ernie's wedding that reminds the reader that the end is not at the Death Camp, but in eternity in the arms of all loved ones who have gone before.

## Language and Meaning

The language of *The Last of the Just* is at times simplistic and straightforward and at other times it is complex, convoluted, and confusing depending on what the character is going through. Ernie Levy has several episodes of what can only be construed as a type of madness, and during those episodes the language is confusing, much as it would be for a madman attempting to interpret what he sees, not knowing what is real and what is created by his brain.

When each point of view changes, the language is true to the character indicating a superior skill on the part of the author. The point of view shifts are so seamless that it

takes concerted effort to detect when they happen. The author is gifted with the ability to handle a topic that most would prefer to ignore and pretend never happened. The story covers an episode in the history of the world that few can justify, and author writes of this time with intimate knowledge of the subject, the settings (many of which he actually lived through) and the colorful people who populate his story.

The enormity of the subject of the book is daunting both for author and reader, but the author handles it with emotion and understanding, anger and humor, love and compassion. The overall effect is to keep the reader moving from the first page to the last, even knowing from the beginning what the ending might be. His words are rich and heart-wrenching, beautiful and unforgettable.

## Structure

The structure of *The Last of the Just* is comprised of eight chapters, some chapters with no sections, and other chapters of eight separate parts. The names of each of the chapters give an idea of the nature of the story within that chapter, with some of the titles deliberately obscure. The first chapter covers the greatest number of years and the most characters, giving a history of the legacy of the Just Men of the Levy family through twelve of the seventeen generations covered in the book. During the years covered in Chapter One, most of these characters move often, fleeing from persecution. By its very nature of being mostly a historical chapter, Chapter One is fast moving but confusing, requiring that the reader re-read several times in order to understand the meaning of Chapter One.

Once the book reaches Chapter Two, the chapters are then divided into parts, with Chapter Two having seven parts and covering most of the years spent by Chaim and Mordecai in Zemyock, Poland. This portion of the book is still historical, but necessary for the reader to understand when the main character is finally introduced in Chapter Three, part seven. Chapter three, which is comprised of eight parts, handles Benjamin's life in Stillenstadt, Germany, his marriage, and how he brings Mordecai and Judith to live with him. Chapter Four, *The Just Man of the Flies*, is six parts, and is still in Stillenstadt, but focuses now on the life of young Ernie Levy as he explores the idea of being a Just Man and determines that he is only worthy to be a Just Man of Flies. Chapter Five, five parts, is told mostly from Herr Kremer's point of view as it is his story about the lives of one Jewish and one Christian child in Stillenstadt. His efforts are doomed to failure, almost as much as Ernie's attempts to be a Just Man when he is a child. Chapter Six, six parts, deals with the exodus of the Levy family to Paris, France. The Levy family is at ease there until World War II breaks out. Ernie enlists in the French Army, and his family is transported to a concentration camp, leading Ernie to explore living as a beast rather than a human. Chapter Seven, five parts, sees Ernie returning to humanity, to God and to love as he returns to Paris, finds some old acquaintances from Zemyock and falls in love with Golda, only to lose her almost immediately. Following her to the concentration camp, Ernie casts his lot with hers. Chapter eight, four parts, details the last legs of Ernie's journey to the death camp where he and Golda die.

The novel can cover centuries in a chapter or it can cover just a few weeks. The author uses a good combination of dialogue and descriptive passages, and yet the book is somewhat confusing to read. Once the reader realizes that Chapter One is the history necessary to understand the remainder of the book, it becomes easier to follow. The only other parts that are difficult to understand are the times of Ernie's descent into madness and when revealing his dreams. It is difficult to divine that which is real from that which is visionary. *The Last of the Just* is a book that will stay with the reader for as long as the reader lives. The story of Ernie Levy's family is so powerful that it will haunt thoughts and dreams for years.

## Quotes

"Our eyes register the light of dead stars." Page 3, Chapter 1.

"When an unknown Just rises to heaven, he is so frozen that God must warm him for a thousand years between His fingers before his soul can open itself to Paradise. And it is known that some remain forever inconsolable at human woe, so that God Himself cannot warm them. So from time to time the Creator, blessed be His name, sets forward the clock of the Last Judgment by one minute." Page 5, Chapter 1

"Suffering becomes Israel like a red ribbon on a white horse. We shall bear the sufferings of the world, we shall take its grief upon ourselves and we shall be considered as punished, stricken by the Lord and humiliated. And then only, when Israel is suffering from head to foot, in all its bones, and all its flesh and all its nerves, prostrate at the crossing of roads, then only will God send the Messiah!" Page 46, Chapter 2

"What's new about the war?" Page 46, Chapter 2

"It's an old question. But to answer it, we'd have to know what goes in the heart of a Lamed-Vovnik and he himself doesn't know, isn't aware that his heart is bleeding away. He thinks it's simply life passing through him. When a Just Man smiles at a baby, there is so much suffering in him, they say, as in a Just Man undergoing martyrdom. And you see, when a Lamed-Vovnik weeps, or whatever he does, even when he's in bed as I am with the wife he loves, he takes upon himself a thirty-sixth part of all the sufferings on earth. But he doesn't know it, and his wife doesn't know it and half his heart cries out while the other half sings." Page 57, Chapter 2

"Although its origin would always remain mysterious, in time the act of aggression against Ernie took its place in the series of anti-Semitic acts that announced Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Communists being scarce in Stillenstadt and democrats being altogether lacking, it followed naturally that the local section of the Nazi Party directed the full fire of its propaganda against the few Jewish families that were rife in the town." Page 139, Chapter 3

"Ernie slipped behind the patriarch, whose hand suddenly lay across his shoulders like a gigantic necklace of tenderness." Page 153, Chapter 4.

"Immediately prey to a terrible trembling, the patriarch had no idea what to answer. The child's face slowly became bloodless, pallid in the shadow, but his wide, dark eyes, spangled with points of light, glowed passionately against the dim background of the pillow, in the manner of Jewish eyes long ago, of the ecstatic eyes of Zemyock. Mordecai's hand fell to the oblong skull and sheltered it in a sheath of flesh." Page 166, Chapter 4.

"If it's only for God, then I don't understand anything. Is it he then who asks the Germans to persecute us? Oh, Grandfather, the we aren't like other men! We must have done something to him, to God, otherwise he wouldn't be angry at us that way, at just us, the Jews. Right?" Page 174, Chapter 4

"The school comprised perhaps fifteen 'Jewish guests,' as people affected to call them now, and about the same number of Pimpfe - pioneers in the Hitler Youth. But by an unexpected trick of the childish soul, when the latter launched their attack on the Jewish platoon in the corner of the playground near the chestnut tree, many 'apolitical' students joined them for the small, so recreational war. When the Jewish lines broke, they dragged their prisoners to the middle of the playground where, under the prudently detached eyes of the teachers, they amused themselves with them." Page 208, Chapter 5.

"He seized the black speck, which was a fly, and approached the red-hot oven with his arm extended. Ilse had the sudden feeling that Ernie was performing a malevolent rite of the Jews, and everything about him suddenly disgusted her—his thin white wrists and ankles, the curve of his neck, even the graceful movement of his round arm above the gaping oven. . . . But immediately abashed, she saw the fly hopping about on the end of Ernie's thumb, then trotting peacefully on the palm of his hand. Finally, chasing a last wisp of steam, the fly was on the ceiling in one light hop!" Page 218, Chapter 5.

"The swallowtail landed on a violet. Ernie Levy enveloped the flower and the insect in his still moist handkerchief, and slipping a hand beneath it, he snatched at both things together, the butterfly and the violet, and then kneaded them between his already sticky palms. After the swallowtail came a dragonfly, a giant cricket, a beetle, a small butterfly with pearly blue wings, other butterflies, other dragonflies, other grasshoppers. Ernie Levy ran through the meadow, arms spread wide, flapping his hands, gummy with vermin. . . ." Page 241, Chapter 5.

" 'Children,' he murmured in a strange voice, 'my dear children, there are days when I myself don't understand the will of God too well. For a thousand years all over Europe, how many of our women and children have been martyred—not with the peaceful awareness of the Just Men, but with the terrified little souls of lambs? And what good,' the old man went on in great grief, 'is suffering that does not serve to glorify the Name? Why all the useless persecutions?'" Page 267, Chapter 6.

" 'Ah, my dear father!' Benjamin said then, brokenhearted, 'if all that were God's will, who would not rejoice? But I think we are the prey of the wicked—simply a prey. And tell me, my venerable little father, does the chicken rejoice that it serves to glorify God? No, and you know it very well, the chicken is altogether sorry—and reasonably so—to have been born as a chicken, slaughtered as a chicken and eaten as a chicken. There is my opinion on the Jewish question.'" Page 267, Chapter 6.

"Weak and dizzy, Ernie Levy invoked the domestic shades in these words: 'Oh my father, oh my mother, oh, my brothers, oh, my sisters, oh, patriarch, oh, Mother Judith . . . How is it that losing you I cannot lose myself in you? If it is the will of the Eternal, our

God, I damn his name and beg him to gather me up close enough to spit in his face. And if, as all my comrades in the 429th Foreign Infantry Regiment taught me, we must see the will of nature everywhere and in all things, I ask Nature humbly to make me an animal as quickly as possible. Oh, my loved ones, Ernie exiled from Levy is a plant without light." Page 285, Chapter 6.

"Forgive me, I remember he spoke of his grandson—I mean, the son of his son—as if it was certain that the little one would be called to the destiny of a Just Man. 'Not a Just Man of the Levys,' he said, 'but a true Unknown Just, an Inconsolable—one of those whom God dares not even caress with his little finger.' But we are a long way away from that now, aren't we?" Page 309, Chapter 7.

"The train disappears along the track, but the violin music rises like smoke in the sky. Flung back into his solitude, naked and bleeding on the roadbed his legs spread wide between the rails, the wind plucking at every naked fiber of his body, Ernie thinks that separation from a loved one is the most painful foretaste of death. Then the smoke of the violin also disappears, and Ernie cries out in his dream. Cries out. Cries out. Cries out. Page 347, Chapter 7.

" 'O God,' the Just Man Ernie Levy said to himself as bloody tears of pity streamed from his eyes again, 'O Lord, we went forth like this thousands of years ago. We walked across arid deserts and the blood-red Red Sea in a flood of salt, bitter tears. We are very old. We are still walking. Oh, let us arrive, finally!'" Page 372, Chapter 8.

"Yes, at times one's heart could break in sorrow. But often too, preferably in the evening, I can't help thinking that Ernie Levy, dead six million times, is still alive somewhere, I don't know where. . . . Yesterday, as I stood in the street trembling in despair, rooted to the spot, a drop of pity fell from above upon my face. But there was no breeze in the air, no cloud in the sky. . . . There was only a presence." Page 374, Chapter 8.





## Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the three main examples of the word Holocaust in the book using the opening scene, the scene in Zemyock, and the final one at Auschwitz.

Why is the idea that the Just Man can be a simple person rather than a learned person so difficult for the different Jewish people to understand?

Describe the scene where Ernie's young gang of friends re-enacts the Passion of Christ and compare it to the demonstrated hatred of the Jewish people during the pogroms of World War II.

Explain the use of the symbol of the sky in the novel using at least five references from the text.

What happened the day Ernie Levy tried to kill himself? Give an accounting of every injury Ernie suffers that day to lead him to so great a sin.

Compare the treatment of Ernie Levy to the treatment of the Jews in Germany in the late 1930's. Use examples of symbolism for this.

Describe the escalation of violence against the Jewish people in Europe during the dawn of World War II, explaining how their previously peaceful lives were transformed and why. What changed in the people of Europe that they felt justified in turning on someone who is their neighbor?

Give an account of one of the three main episodes of Ernie's madness, describe the instigating factor, how Ernie reacted to it and explain his reaction. Explain how this is in keeping with Ernie's personality.

Discuss the events on the banks of the Schlosse and compare Ernie's actions toward the insects to those of Germany toward the Jewish people.

When did Ernie's transformation into a Just Man begin? Was it a true transformation or wishful thinking? Explain.

At what point in Ernie's life did he begin his real transformation into a Lamed-Vovnik, and was totally unaware of that transformation. Describe this in detail, giving reasons for your answer.

Describe Ernie's final transformation into a Just Man.

Who is Fraulein Blumenthal? Why is she called this?

Explain why the Just Man is unable to take his life as a child but is able to submit to the Nazi death camp to bring about his death later in life? Discuss the motivation for each of these acts.



What did it mean when Ernie cries tears of blood?

Describe Ernie Levy's Wedding, discuss the guests present, the bride, and the event in the bedchamber afterward. What does all of it mean?