

Questions for Discussion on *Shayna*

1. In the Prologue, why does Shayna, as an old woman, lie to David's grandson about whether anyone in the family had been named Sarah?
2. How do the major characters change throughout the novel? What personal qualities help them survive?
3. How do the childhood experiences of the characters influence their actions as adults?
4. Do the characters have different relationships to religion/God? Are their individual spiritual journeys important in the novel?
5. What do the minor characters, Yankel, the rebetsn in Antwerp, Bluma, Ulkeh and Mike contribute to the plot of the novel?
6. How do the characters respond to the trauma they have experienced?
7. What sustains Shayna as she struggles to survive?
8. What changes for Shayna when she remembers her mother's words, "Understanding comes at a snail's pace?"
9. Discuss the physical, spiritual and emotional journeys in the novel.
10. How do you think you would respond in similar circumstances? For example, if you were Yussi, would you accept the baby? If you had to leave your home under duress, what would you want to take with you?
11. Do you have a family story of immigration? Is there such a thing as a typical immigration story?
12. Are you aware of any symbols in the novel?
13. What aspects of the plot contribute to the pace of the novel?
14. What impact did life in New York have on the characters?
15. Did you have a favorite scene in the novel? Why do you think it stood out for you?
16. Do you think setting plays a role in this novel?
17. Are the Yiddish words and phrases important or unnecessary in *Shayna*? Was the glossary necessary?
18. What will you remember about *Shayna*?