

## **Discussion Questions for Ruth Tenzer Feldman's *The Ninth Day***

### **The Friis Family**

- How does the death of Ephraim Jacobowitz influence the lives and perspectives of Hope and her family?
- How do Henry Friis's religion (Lutheran) and his passion (physics) influence the story?
- What role does Josh play in the story?
- How might the relationship between Dagmar and Hope been different if Hope didn't stutter?

### **The World of Miriam Hope Friis**

- If you could change one aspect of Hope's personality, what would it be? How would that have changed the outcome of the story?
- Based on what is revealed in the story, what are the chances that Hope and Gabriel might develop as strong and loving a relationship as Avram and Dolcette, or Rachel and Henry Friis, have?
- How much of Hope's personality was influenced by her stutter?
- Why do you think that Leona and Hope are best friends?
- Is it realistic of Hope to think that she can make a career in classical singing?
- Hope is named for her grandmother, Miriam Josefsohn, who is featured in *Blue Thread*. In what ways is Hope

different from her grandmother? In what ways is she the same?

### **The Berkeley End of the Story**

- If you were a student at Berkeley in 1964, would you have supported the Free Speech Movement even when the students went on strike and disrupted classes? Why? Why not?
- Mario Savio had spent the summer of 1964 helping to secure voting rights for African Americans in Mississippi. How do you think that might have influenced his actions in the Free Speech Movement?
- What are the similarities and differences between the occupation of Sproul Hall in 1964 and the “Occupy Movement” that began in 2011?
- what role, if any, did the assassination of President Kennedy play in the story?
- LSD was still legal in California in 1964, and remained so until 1966. How do you think the easy availability of LSD affect the story?
- Suppose that Hanukkah did not happen to occur during the height of the FSM protests in 1964. What impact would that have on the story?

### **The Paris End of the Story**

- Ergotism was prevalent in France and Germany during the time of the First Crusade. The disease has played a role in several historical events, including, the witch trials

- in Salem, Massachusetts. How much of individual and societal behavior comes down to chemistry?
- How would the story have changed if Dolcette's mother, Miriam, had made it to Paris?
  - The rabbi's wife seems to believe that Avram should be allowed to fulfill his vow. What role does religion, magic, and superstition play in the story? How has society changed in this regard over the past 900 years?
  - What do you think would have happened if Hope had failed to persuade Avram that she was an angel? Would she have taken the baby? Why? Why not?

### **The Writer's Craft**

- How much history should an author put in historical fiction? What are the pitfalls for writers—and readers—of this genre?
- Suppose the 1964 end of *The Ninth Day* were written from Dagmar's point of view. How much of the story could she have told us? How would the story have been different from the one we read from Hope's point of view?
- The book's prologue starts with a scene describing Serakh as she takes learns about Avram and his vow. How does the prologue enhance or diminish to tension in the first few chapters of the story, when we know more about Dolcette and her baby than Hope does?
- What are the strengths and flaws of the "time travel" logic?