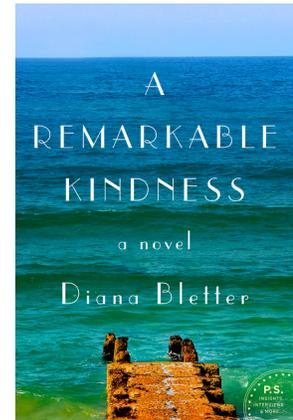


A Remarkable Kindness

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Introduction

From a striking new voice comes a novel tracing the lives of four American women who are part of a unique Jewish tradition in their coastal village in Northern Israel: they prepare and dress women for burial, as they grow in friendship and marriages, learn to accept death, and to appreciate the sorrows and wonders of life.

Through a largely hidden ceremony...four friends discover the true meaning of life.

It's 2006 in a seaside village in Israel, where a war is brewing. Lauren, Emily, Aviva and Rachel, four memorable women from different backgrounds, are drawn to the village. Lauren, a maternity nurse, loves her Israeli doctor husband but struggles to make a home for herself in a foreign land miles away from her beloved Boston. Seeking a fresh start after divorce, her vivacious friend Emily follows. Strong, sensuous Aviva, brought to Israel years earlier by intelligence work, has raised a family and now lost a son. And Rachel, a beautiful, idealistic college graduate from Wyoming, arrives with her hopeful dreams.

The women forge a friendship that sustains them as they come to terms with love and loss, and the outbreak of war. Their intimate bond is strengthened by their participation in a traditional ritual that closes the circle of life. As their lives are slowly transformed, each finds unexpected strength and resilience.

Brimming with wisdom, rich in meaningful insights, *A Remarkable Kindness* is a moving testament to women's friendship, illuminating a mostly unknown ritual that underscores what it means to truly be alive.

Questions for Discussion

1. The role of the friendship among the women is an important theme of *A Remarkable Kindness*. How did the women's friendship change overtime? How did their friendship sustain them?
 2. Aviva, Emily, Rachel, and Lauren are all part of a special circle that gives them emotional support. Do you have a "circle" of friends or a group that gives your life special meaning?
 3. Some of the characters in the novel leave America to escape the expected and familiar. Do you see this as an American story? And if not, why not? Why do you think each of the characters react differently to living in Israel?
 4. America was founded by people who came to its shores. When we leave it, which part of our national identity comes with us? Which part of our personal identity do we leave behind? And, if you were to move to another country, where would you go and why?
 5. Lauren feels like the life she's living isn't the one she's supposed to have. She's moved to Israel for the strongest reasons, love and family, but can't shake the part of her that longs for home, in Boston. What do you think drives what Emily calls Lauren's "romance for a city"? How does being in Israel transform Lauren?
 6. Emily takes chances, like impulsively moving across the world to join Lauren. She makes choices that seem risky, but doesn't obsess over her mistakes. How does her sense of fate reflect her choices? Do you relate to her motivations and actions, or are you more of a thinker and a planner?
 7. Rachel moved to Israel with the desire to change things and help work for peace. She tries different sorts of work, meeting people who challenge her on many levels, but sometimes feels that she might be "chasing exhilarating experiences that were all wrong." Do you think she finds what she's looking for?
 8. Aviva endures the loss of a child and a husband, with no choice but to keep living: One night she "curled up on her side, wanting to squish the grief right out of her," but forced by Rachel to leave the house, is reminded "that the universe is still there and hadn't entirely abandoned her." How does she learn to heal from her sorrows? Have you or someone you know experienced grief like this?
 9. Do you believe that life a series of accidental turns, as Lauren does? Or that things happen for a reason, as Emily supposes? Do the events in the book prove either idea?
 10. For the women of the burial circle, the ritual makes them appreciate their lives with fresh eyes. Do you have similar routines or reminders in your life to inspire you to live in the moment?
 11. The novel has a strong message about the circle of life, and its inevitable end—not only the death of those we love, but our own. What kind of ritual would you like for yourself after you've gone—or none at all? Which clothes do you want to be buried in? Do you want to be buried at all? Would you like someone to recite a special prayer for you? A song? A poem?
 12. In the neighborhood of the novel, in contrast to the war going on in the larger setting, a wide variety of people form deep and abiding relationships. Do you have friends with different beliefs and customs than yours? How does your own community compare?
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13. What did you learn about Jewish traditions? Do you turn to religious traditions during crises? What kind of rituals do you have to help deal with grief? What does the novel teach about spirituality and faith??
