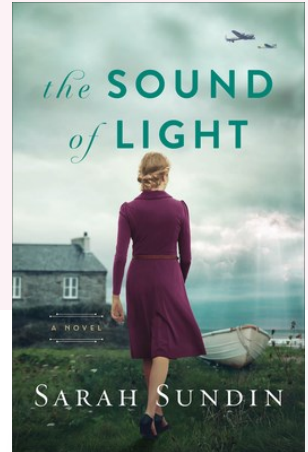




# LEADER'S GUIDE

## THE SOUND OF LIGHT BY SARAH SUNDIN



"Don't you see, by not opposing the Germans, we're effectively allying with them? Isn't that a greater evil? Isn't that worth risking our comfort and safety?"

**LAILA BEREND**

### THEMES

Courage

Resistance

Transformation

Father – Son Relationships

Romance

Gender Roles

Secrets

### HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

War

Prison and Violence

### CHARACTERS

*Baron Henrick Ahlefeldt (Henning/Hemming/The Havmand)* was a self-centred playboy aristocrat who, after being put through a spiritual furnace and trial, uncovers a desire for sacrificial living and a deep need to fight for justice against the Nazis. Once an Olympic rower, used to accolades, attention and worldly success, Henrick adopts the name 'Hemming' and transforms into a gentle labourer to cover his secret identity as a freedom fighter and 'The Havmand'.

*Dr. Else Jensen* is an American physicist stationed in Copenhagen. Although tensions increase with the Nazis, she refuses to abandon her research and life's dream. Else is a kind-hearted and considerate woman, but she must learn to be courageous and outspoken against misogyny in a male-dominated workplace where she battles against the social norms of her time. While printing resistance newspapers, Else learns to be humble and brave, not viewing her exceptional intelligence as something that makes her better than others but as a gift to be used to protect those in need.

*Dr. Laila Berend* is an intelligent, passionate and fiery woman. She works next door to Else's lab at the Mathematics Institute. She encourages Else to pursue righteousness and bravery in the face of Nazi laws

and great oppression against her fellow Jewish people. Laila works for the Resistance, aiding the production and dispersal of illegal newspapers.

*Svend* is Henrick's childhood friend. When the Germans occupied Denmark, he asked Henrick to help him flee to Sweden via boat, inadvertently sparking Henrick's desire to become 'The Havmand'.

## BOOK SUMMARY

Paths cross between freedom fighters Henrik and Else during the German takeover of Denmark in the 1940s.

Henrick, known as 'Hemming', works undercover at his father's shipping yard, assisting with espionage and secretly transporting documents to Sweden via his row boat. His daring sacrifice for the Resistance earns him the famous title 'The Havmand'.

American physicist Dr. Else Jensen uses her resources at the lab as an opportunity to print resistance newspapers. She hears stories of the movement's legendary Havmand but never dreams the quiet, simple, but kind 'Hemming' - who lodges at the boarding house with herself and her best friend Laila - is him!

When the Occupation cracks down on the Danes, Henrick and Else must learn to trust one another and work together to help rescue the Jewish community in Denmark.

This story is about "ordinary people responding to extraordinary circumstances with faith, fortitude, and hope for a brighter future."



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Who was your favourite character from *The Sound of Light*? Why?

### TALKING POINTS

Some of the reasons we may feel connected to a particular character;

- Empathy/Sympathy.
- Pity.
- Similar character traits.
- Similar circumstances.
- Similar desires, hopes or dreams.
- Similar mistakes made in our own lives.
- We may like or dislike a particular character.

2

Q. Else is a brilliant woman working in a 'man's world'. She battles a misogynistic superior in the lab, but also her prideful tendencies. How does Else grow in humbleness throughout the story?

### TALKING POINTS

Working in the lab Else is forced to control her emotions and carefully respond to unfair and untrue accusations. Else knows she's intelligent and often chastises herself for her accidental superiority and pursues a humble heart;

- Else shocks herself when she realises that she believes specific jobs are "beneath her"; for example, using the printing press. However, God used this situation to help further resistance efforts, and inadvertently, this task became one of the most valuable things Else could do.
- Else humbles herself and battles her pride as she falls in love with Hemming.

3

Q. Q. Henrick's transformation from playboy aristocrat to 'The Havmand' is a powerful testimony to the Holy Spirit's power to change lives radically. What did you enjoy most about Henrick's story? Can you relate to his transformation journey?

### TALKING POINTS

A crucial part of Henrick's journey is the prompt he felt to read the Word of God;

- Henrick's mother role modelled the Christian faith to Henrick as a boy and powerfully influenced his desire to read the Word as a wayfaring man.
- Henrick's 'gold' (bravery and sacrifice) was revealed through his trials and suffering.
- When Henrick was undercover as Hemming, the Word was a profound comfort for him amidst his loneliness.
- "I died to that life" – Henrick.

4

Q. Henrick tells Else, "Next time, you will be brave earlier." How does every step of courage make the next step easier?

### TALKING POINTS

God equips us day by day as we require it. If God were to pour all of the courage into our hearts that we needed for a lifetime, we would be at risk of pride and forsaking our reliance on Him. Instead, we can put one foot in front of the other, knowing God gives us our daily bread – and a daily portion of courage, and whatever else we need for obedience, afresh each day.

5

Q. Laila asks Else, "You're willing to do something wrong to do something right?". Espionage and resistance work required faithful Christians to lie and steal (among other things) to fight against evil. Discuss how the characters in the book manage this tension between obeying God's law and doing what's right.

### TALKING POINTS

Many Danish people were adamant about abiding by the law and disliked riots and rule-breaking. This changed as the laws became wicked under Nazi rule, but there were still some whose habit of law-abiding was so ingrained that they accepted the Nazi rule:

- Else decides, "I'm willing to do something right. Telling the truth is right."
- Fru Riber, the boarding house owner where Else, Laila and Henrick live, betrays them to abide by the Nazi law.

Is lying ever okay? How did members of the Resistance come to terms with what they felt they must do?

- Many Christians came to terms with their actions as they felt the end justifies the means.
- The Resistance would never be successful if they were 100% honest.
- Sin begins in our hearts, and the heart posture is something the Lord assesses.
- The actions of the Resistance were self-sacrificing for the good of others.

## 6

Q. What was your favourite part of Else and Henrick's love story?

### TALKING POINTS

Both Henrick and Else struggled with their affection for one another:

- Else ponders, "Attraction couldn't sustain a relationship, but neither could intellectual stimulation. She'd always longed for both. Could companionship suffice?"
- Henrick battles the desire to reveal his true self, but also wants to keep Else in the dark about who he truly is to protect her from the Nazis.

## 7

Q. In Chapter 20, Else reads an excerpt from 'The Works of Love' to Henrick. Read the section together and discuss.

### TALKING POINTS

The Works of Love by Soren Kierkegaard (p124);

We can be deceived by believing what is untrue, but we certainly are also deceived by not believing what is true.

We can be deceived by appearances, but we certainly are also deceived by the sagacious appearance, by the flattering conceit that considers itself absolutely secure against being deceived.

Which deception is more dangerous?

What is more difficult – to awaken someone who is sleeping, or to awaken someone, who, awake, is dreaming that he is awake?

## 8

Q. Father-son relationships are a theme in the novel. Discuss Henrick's relationship with his father. Can you relate to his struggles? Were you satisfied with the outcome?

### TALKING POINTS

Although Henrick and his father's relationship was tense because of his father's unnecessary pressure to succeed and lack of encouragement and pride in Henrick, it was made worse through many misunderstandings.

- "In my determination to bend you toward greatness, I broke you". Henrick's father projected unfair and unrealistic expectations on his son, damaging their relationship.
- In chapter 34, Henrick feels compassion and love towards his father. He regrets his past actions and decides to forgive: "I forgive you, father". Henrick realises that in forgiving his father, a heavy burden has been lifted from him.
- When Henrick and his father meet in prison, the relationship is restored, and both realise they've misunderstood and underestimated one another.

# 9

Q. What was the most significant point of tension for you in the story?

## TALKING POINTS

The atrocities which occurred during World War II were overwhelmingly evil. Historical fiction, biographies, and novels have a unique way of sharing the emotive side of history, which textbooks often lack (as textbooks can be dull texts of dates, facts and paragraphs full of information and missing the personal or emotional side of the stories).

Answers may vary and could include:

- The work of the Resistance and the constant danger they faced.
- Henrick's capture, transportation and imprisonment in a Nazi jail and the methods used by Gestapo to interrogate and harm others who were against their regime.
- Else's escape from the boarding house.
- The anticipation of Laila and her family's escape from Copenhagen.

# 10

Q. What is the significance of the story's title *The Sound of Light*? What is one thing you'd like to remember from this story?

## TALKING POINTS

"The sound of light – Lyd-af-Lys... a perfect name for this home" (Else, Chapter 36). Lyd-af-Lys became a place of light amongst the darkness:

- Henrick rows his boat in the Oresund, the strait on the Danish-Swedish border commonly known as "the Sound" in English. While on the water, Henrick himself was being the light of Christ and assisting in the resistance. However, it was crucial that no light or sounds were heard while he was rowing.
- "Light sounds like speech. Whenever someone speaks words of courage, speaks out for the downtrodden and oppressed, speaks out against injustice. It sounds like the cranking of the handle of a mimeograph machine in a trembling hand. That's the sound of light" (Henrick, ch 36).
- Through the hardship of the war, light and goodness were revealed in Henrick and Else: "The past few years have served as a prism. Our colorless lives hit that sharp, glassy edge. We could have been broken. We weren't... the colors came out" (Else and Hnerick, ch 51).



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