

When I first read Chaim Potok's "The Chosen", I was absolutely stunned. I didn't believe it was possible for one book to teach me so much. "The Chosen" is based on the story of two Jewish teenage boys growing up in Brooklyn during World War II. Although at the beginning of the book the two characters, Reuven and Danny, hated each other, they soon discover a passion for life that unites them in a deep friendship. Through their friendship, I learned about life and learned things about myself along that way that I never knew before.

In the beginning of the story, Danny explains how his father, who is a Hasidic Rabbi, only speaks to him when they're studying the Talmud. The rest of the time there is only silence between them. Silence. At first, Danny trusts that his father is doing this for a good reason, so he follows the silence complacently. Eventually the silence becomes such a heavy burden that Danny feels trapped. As I read Danny's plea for understanding from Reuven, I realized that I understood. I understand the feeling of having so much to say, yet no chance to speak it, to have so many questions and no chance to ask them. The need for companionship and speech is so powerful, that when it's gone, it's almost like there's no oxygen. It's hard to breathe or even live without connections to other people, when so desperately wanting the chance.

Who then, can fill this massive void that silence causes? Who can give you the strength and support to question your life and not be afraid to live it? Friends. They can lift you up and talk to you and not only talk, but listen. Danny's sadness was not only that his father would not listen to him, but he would not tell him his thoughts and his beliefs. I have been fortunate in my life to have great friends, but I am also ashamed to say that up until I read this book I was not very appreciative of that fact. I, just as most

people, would readily admit that friendship is important. Although I would readily admit it, I did not understand. After reading about Danny's loneliness, I knew that I was blessed to never know the depth of the pain which Danny felt every day: the stabbing, heavy, ache for someone to talk to. I've always had people who care for me, and I now know that not everyone has that gift. So maybe the next time I don't feel like taking the extra time to talk with the lonely man in the coffee shop, or even ask how someone is doing, I will not only take the time, but I will gladly be a friend for whomever needs one.

In the story, Reuven often discusses how he feels with his father, who always has something important to share on just about any subject. It is during one of these discussions that I really connected with one of the main ideas in the book. Reuven's father is discussing how short life is and how meaningful it can still be. He compares a lifespan to the blink of an eye. Even though it would seem that having such a short time here would make life seem meaningless, I had to realize that this was not true. Life can be meaningful by how much meaning each person puts into it, whether it be a day long or a hundred years. If people spend their entire lives doing things that are important to them, no matter what it is, then their life mattered. If I do what I think is right and I continue to live how I believe I should be living, then it doesn't matter how much I can fit into the blink of an eye.

By the end of the story I along with Danny was completely infuriated with Danny's father. I was so sure that nothing could possibly justify the cruelty of the silence that he had caused upon his son. No parent should ever treat his or her child in that manner, not someone whom they should love. It is not until the last few pages of the book that Danny's father, Reb Saunders, explains to Danny and Reuven why he had been

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silent for years. Reb Saunders tells how since a young age, Danny had been an extremely intelligent child. He would read books and be delighted with the stories in general, but he lacked the compassion to relate to the people in the stories. Reb noticed this same quality in relating to other people. Danny would focus on his intellectual perceptions without using his heart. Reb Saunder knew that to be a good person, Danny must learn to think with his mind and his heart. To do this, Danny must learn what is in his own soul, and the only way to do that is through silence.

Through silence, people are forced to have discussions and arguments within their mind, and learn how they truly feel. Not only can people get to know themselves, but through silence, they can learn to step into other people's shoes and feel their pain and passion. Danny learned this through his silence and I learned it through him. After I finished the book I knew that I had changed as a person. I wasn't taller or wittier, but I knew that I had learned more not just about myself, but about people in general. I know about people's longing for friends and relationships, and I now know how important those relationship are. When I do have a problem now, I don't always feel the need to talk about it. Instead, I wait for the silence. I use it to look inside myself and answer my own problems. Now that this essay has come to a conclusion, I hope that the reader looks forward to the best part of this essay: the silence that follows.