22. Discuss the reactions of Mr. Malter and Reb Saunders to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Tell what each does and says with his grief.

'Reb Saunders sits and waits for the Messiah. I am tired of waiting. Now is the time to bring the Messiah, not to wait for him.' (p217)

Mr. Malter is convinced that after the Holocaust, Jews had the right—and should use that right—to establish a modern Jewish state. Without the establishment of such a state, no meaning would be given to the terrible crimes committed against the Jews during World War II and the slaughter of six million Jews. Reb Saunders, as a Hasidic Jew, contradicts this idea by stating that all Jews should wait for the coming of the Messiah before reuniting their people, regardless the Holocaust. He despises Zionism, even to such a degree that he forbids Danny to communicate with the son of a Zionist Rabbi.

23. Discuss Mr. Malter’s assertion, “A man must fill his life with meaning. Meaning is not automatically given to life.”

To discover the true meaning of these sentences, you must have a look at the context.

The following passage already gives us more insight to what Mr. Malter was saying here. ‘A span of life is nothing. But the man who lives that span, he is something. He can fill that tiny span with meaning, so its quality is immeasurable though its quantity may be insignificant.’

I believe that he is implying here that it doesn’t matter who we were born, nor does it matter who we have become, it is what we do that defines us.

24. What causes Reuven and his father to be “excommunicated” from the Saunders family? How does Danny react?

The father of Danny had read the account of Reb Malter’s Zionist speech in the Yiddish press, and because of his consistent disapproval Danny is forbidden all contact with Reuven, on the punishment of immediate removal from college. His father’s decision deeply agonizes Danny, but because of the harsh consequences (and out of respect for the man who raised him) he can not disobey.

25. What does Reuven understand about his teacher, Rev Gershenson, when he is unable to find his name listed in either the Hebrew or English catalogues of his college library?

Given the fact that Rev Gershenson is teaching at a conservative college, he can not publish his beliefs regarding the study of controversial Talmud. That is why he is can not be found in either one of the catalogues, and Reuven (because of his connections with Hasidism) realizes this.

26. Why do Reuven and his father “weep with joy” when the United Nations votes to accept the Partition Plan? What does this mean for Mr. Malter in particular?

Everything Mr. Malter has worked for has not been in vain. By the United Nations’ endorsement to establish a Jewish state, real meaning has been given to the injustices done to the Jews.

27. Describe the method Reuven uses to study the nine lines of text he is certain Rev Gershenson will question him on.

First, he used the traditional way, carefully studying the text, memorizing it and researching the various commentaries. He also tried to anticipate questions Rev Gershenson might ask.
For this specific passage though, Reuven critically studied the text again, consulting parallel texts. Because of the fact that all but one of the commentaries failed to satisfy him (this one commentary seemed to be based upon another text though), he decided to use his fathers technique, reconstructing the original correct text.

28. What does Rev Gershenson admit about the passage of Talmud he has asked Reuven to explain and about the way Reuven has attempted to explain it?

Rev Gershenson admits that the passage is too complex to comprehend, even for him. He is extremely pleased with the way Reuven has been able to analyse the passage, as well as with the way he has reconstructed the text, although he politely asks Reuven never to use such a method of explanation in his class.

Chapter 15

29. Why does Danny now resume his friendship with Reuven? What does this show about his ties with his father?

Right after the Jewish State of Israel is born, Arab forces begin to invade it, expressing their disgust at the entire happening. Many Jews are being murdered (in Israel), of which one of the Hirsch college students. Later on, as Israel is gaining strength and is –more or less- able to control the insurgencies, Reb Saunders decides to stop the anti-Zionistic movement he’s in charge of. This, and the death of a fellow student cause Danny to resume his friendship with Reuven. All of the time Danny has been respecting the will of his father, but now that his fathers opposition towards Zionism seems to have ceased he no longer feels obliged to refrain from talking with Reuven.

30. What advice does Mr. Malter give Danny about telling his father he has decided to become a psychologist? Why is this such a significant decision? What are its possible consequences?

Mr. Malter is aware that Danny’s wish to become a psychologist would also mean that he could not become the rabbi his father wanted him to be, and therefore a long-held tradition in their family would be broken. He tells Danny to think about what he’s going to say real carefully, because the words he will then speak will have a major impact on the rest of his life. He must also prepare to answer the questions which Reb Saunders will almost inevitably (being unaware yet of the conversation that will take place between Reb Saunders, his son and Reuven later on) ask him.

The possibility exists that Danny’s father will become outrageous or extremely upset about the choice Danny has made.

Chapter 18

31. What do you learn about Reb Saunders’ own childhood and of his objective in raising Danny?

In chapter 18 it becomes clear that Reb Saunders himself was raised in silence. He would be woken up in the middle of the night by his father, who would tell him stories of the destruction of Jerusalem and the terrible suffering of the Israelites, and Reb Saunders would cry. Reb Saunders was to become a tzaddik, and for a tzaddik, his father believed, it was absolutely necessary to know of pain, because pain destroys many negative characteristics. A tzaddik had the heavy duty of carrying the pain of his people, to suffer for hem. Reb Saunders wanted Danny to be raised a
tzaddik, because he knew that Danny had ‘a mind like a pearl, like a sun’ but not a soul. He
wanted Danny to become familiar with suffering, so he could learn to show compassion for his
people, and learn to carry their burdens.

32. Why does Reb Saunders accept his son’s decision “without fear”?
Because of the way he raised him, Reb Saunders finally knows that his son, no matter what job
he takes or where he goes with his life, will always have the soul of a tzaddik. Bearing this in
mind, he feels he no longer has to worry about the fate of his son.

33. What does it mean that all his life Danny will be “a tzaddik…a tzaddik for the
world”?
Danny’s father realised from the beginning onwards that Danny had an exceptional mind, and
would want to keep learning, without being limited to reading the Talmud and other holy
scriptures. He was aware that he could not force Danny to become a rabbi, because that would
be a living hell for him, but he wanted to at least make sure that if Danny did not wish to become
a tzaddik for his people, he would become a tzaddik for the world, showing compassion and
helping the needy.

34. For what and of whom does Reb Saunders ask forgiveness? In what ways does
Reb Saunders’ reaction surprise you? How had you expected him to react?
Reb Saunders asks forgiveness for the harsh way in which he kept Reuven and Daniel apart for
two years, after he got angry at Reuvens fathers’ Zionism. He also apologizes to his son Danny,
because of the way he raised him. What I found particularly astonishing is the way in which Reb
Saunders, a man with great knowledge and authority, admits to his son and Reuven that he has
been wrong blaming other people for his own struggles in life, and that he was not a wise father
having raised Danny the way he did. This act testifies of the humble way in which even a tzaddik
like Reb Saunders could react. I had expected him to get angry at his son, and threaten him with
all kinds of repercussions, but he didn’t.

35. What does it reveal about Danny that he has decided he will raise his own son
“in silence”?
It reveals that he finally understands why his father treated him with silence, and that he now
even agrees to it. He may not have liked it, which is also why he will use another way if he can,
but the wish to raise his own son a tzaddik has been carried over.

36. What is it that Reb Saunders says he has understood all along about Danny?
How is this related to his gratefulness to Reuven and his father?
Reb Saunders understood that Danny was too much of a genius to keep himself trapped within
his own culture. He knew Danny had the urge to learn all about the world, because of his
photographic memory and his brilliance. Right at a time in his life when his son was ready to
rebel against everything he was taught, Reuven and his father step in. According to Reb
Saunders, Reuven and his father both had a good soul, and therefore he sees them as a blessing
for his son, because they can be his ‘closed eyes and sealed ears’, for Reb Saunders had
decided to raise his son in silence. He is extremely grateful for their coming in his own life and his
son’s life, because through them, he was able to talk to Danny.