



## *Pushing the Limits of Tradition* Suggested Reading and Discussion Questions

Adults pass along practices to children, and the human body physically benefits from the repetition of motions and routines—two very different types of traditions! Traditions can manifest in many ways—such as beliefs, events, and even repetitions of certain activities. Include in your discussions how our traditions can become springboards to exceeding our current limitations.

### *The Physician*

**Noah Gordon, Fiction.** An orphan leaves Dark Ages London to study medicine in Persia in this “rich” and “vivid” historical novel from a *New York Times*–bestselling author (*The New York Times*).

A child holds the hand of his dying mother and is terrified, aware *something* is taking her. Orphaned and given to an itinerant barber-surgeon, Rob Cole becomes a fast-talking swindler, peddling a worthless medicine. But as he matures, his strange gift - an acute sensitivity to impending death - never leaves him, and he yearns to become a healer.

Arab *madrassas* are the only authentic medical schools, and he makes his perilous way to Persia. Christians are barred from Muslim schools, but claiming he is a Jew, he studies under the world’s most renowned physician, Avicenna. How the woman who is his great love struggles against her only rival – medicine - makes a riveting modern classic. *The Physician* is the first book in *New York Times*–bestselling author Noah Gordon’s Dr. Robert Cole trilogy, which continues with *Shaman* and concludes with *Matters of Choice*.

- What did you think about the interweaving of the historically-based story with the magical realism of Rob’s gift?
- How do the traditions of the European cultures make it hard to study medicine? How do traditions in other cultures (Jewish and Moslem) address that similarly or differently? Are there other traditions that you can think of that have slowed down scientific progress in different times and places?
- The history of fake medicine peddlers is certainly widespread in the US, have you heard of “quack nostrums” from the turn of the 20th century? Do you have thoughts about why we humans like to embrace the idea of “miracle medicines” even in the face of evidence they don’t work?

