

THE CONFESSIONS OF NOA WEBER

By Gail Hareven
Translated by Dalya Bilu
First published in Hebrew by Keter, 200
English translation published by Melville House, 2009
Study guide by Ilana Kurshan

ABOUT THE BOOK:

This novel is narrated from the perspective of Noa Weber, a 47-year-old lawyer and author who looks back on her life in an attempt to understand her obsessive love for a mysterious Russian emigre named Alek. Noa first meets Alek at a party in Jerusalem when she is seventeen. She falls hopelessly in love with him and becomes pregnant with his child. Alek, who works as a foreign correspondent, is a continuous but elusive presence in her life -- Noa meets him in Russia or Paris whenever he beckons. Noa's love for Alex, to whom she remains legally married, does not waver throughout various life changes and occupations—the birth of her daughter, Hagar, whom she raises on her own; a stint as a lawyer; and a career as an author of feminist thrillers--causing Noa to wonder if her love isn't part of some larger yearning. Her story unfolds against the backdrop of Israel's leaders, wars, and its sociopolitical developments, which set into relief the drama of Noa's own trials and tribulations. .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Gail Hareven was born in Jerusalem in 1959. She studied behavioral sciences at Ben-Gurion University and Talmud and Jewish philosophy at the Shalom Hartman Institute. Hareven, a journalist, has written widely on politics and feminist issues. She has been a columnist for *Maariv*, *Hadashot*, the *Jerusalem Report* and *Lady Globes*, and she also writes book reviews for the Hebrew press. In addition, she teaches feminist theory and offers writing workshops and lectures on a variety of socio-cultural topics. In 2006, she was visiting professor at the University of Illinois. Hareven has published six novels, three collections of short stories, two non-fiction books, two children's books and four plays, all of which have been staged. In 2002, she received the prestigious Sapir Prize for *The Confessions of Noa Weber*.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why does Noa refer to her hometown as J rather than as Jerusalem? What does she mean when she says that “altogether it’s impossible to talk about Jerusalem anymore” (p. 7). Do you have places that you cannot speak of because they are so laden with associations and emotional resonance?
2. How does Noa describe her childhood on the kibbutz? How would you describe her feelings about the way she was raised? Why does she tell her readers to forget “the propaganda of the Jewish National Fund” (p. 21) in order to understand her background? How does this fit in with what you know about kibbutzim?
3. How do you understand the political views of Alek and his friend’s in the early 1970s? Why, for instance, does Alek’s friend Yoash change his name to Hamida? Has anyone in your family ever changed their names? Why?
4. How does Noa react to her daughter Hagar’s decision to become a rabbi? How would you describe Noa’s views on religion? Do you think it is significant that Hagar travels to New York for studies?
5. Why does Noa marry Alek? How does her decision relate to her feelings about Alek, about the army, and about Jerusalem? Do you see anything ethically problematic about her decision?
6. Today in Israel, all Jewish marriages must take place under the auspices of the Orthodox Rabbinat. How would you describe Noa’s experience when she and Alek go to the Rabbinat to get married? What is the role of the religious woman who speaks with her? How do you think you would feel if you were in Noa’s shoes?
7. What does Noa mean when she says that she is “not just a WASP, but a descendant of the Mayflower in Israeli terms” (p. 71)? What do you know about her family? Do you know any families like this, either in America or in Israel?
8. Why do you think that Noa’s neighbor Miriam Marie is so kind to Noa after she gives birth? Noa says, “If I was a real writer and a proper human being, I would have written her story and not mine” (p. 183). Why does Noa say this? What is interesting about Miriam Marie’s story? Is it a uniquely Israeli story?
9. What finally leads Noa’s Aunt Greta to come visit Israel? How would you describe her relationship with the state of Israel? Do you identify with any aspects of this relationship?



10. Where was Noa when Rabin was assassinated? How does she describe the reaction in Israel to this event? Do you remember where you were when Rabin was assassinated, and what the reaction was in your community?
11. Which wars take place in the background of this novel? How do they influence the personal lives of the various characters, from Amikam to Noa to Alek? Do you think that the wars that your country has been through during this period have made as much of an impact on the society in which you live?
12. In what ways is this a feminist novel? Would you say that the feminism of an Israeli woman like Noa differs from that of other literary characters in feminist novels you have read? How?

REVIEW QUOTES:

Consider these quotes individually. What does each add to your understanding of Gail Hareven and her work? Do you agree with the claims they make?

“[Noa is] a likable character, and Hareven pulls off the difficult task of allowing the reader to evaluate Noa and Alek's relationship from both inside it and outside of it. This contemplative inquiry into the nature of love speaks across cultures and introduces a compelling new Israeli voice to English-speaking readers.”
--*Publisher's Weekly*

“A very wise book, and it is written in the most beautiful, precise and definitive prose.”
--Lia Nirgad, *Ha'aretz Literary Supplement*

“ Sometimes one has the experience of reading a book and just falling in love with it—because it is so well written, so moving, it gets into your soul. That was my experience when I read *The Confessions of Noa Weber*.”
--Eleonora Lev, *Ha'aretz*

