

IF YOU AWAKEN LOVE

By Emuna Elon
Translated by David Hazony
First published in Hebrew by Keter, 2004
English translation published by Toby Press, 2007
Study guide by Ilana Kurshan

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Set between the Six Day War (1967) and the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1995), this novel is the story of Shlomtzion Dror, who grew up in a religious community in Jerusalem. As a teenager she fell in love with her friend Yair Berman, who broke off their engagement when his rabbi refused to give them his blessing. Devastated, Shlomtzion fled to the desert where she married quickly, gave birth to a daughter, divorced her husband, and reinvented herself as an interior designer in Tel Aviv. Twenty years later, her daughter Maya, a newly-observant Jew, announces that she intends to marry Yair's son Ariel. Shlomtzion, now a secular leftist who supports the Oslo peace accords, travels to a West Bank settlement to meet her future son-in-law and to be reunited with Yair. The book chronicles her attempts to come to terms with Yair, with herself, with the choices she has made, and with the shape her life has taken.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Emuna Elon was born in Jerusalem in 1955. She has published one novel, seven children's books and many short stories. Elon, the wife of Knesset member Benny Elon, has lived in the settlement of Beit-El since 1982, and has six children.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In the opening pages of the book, Shlomtzion explains that her grandmother Malka was forced to divorce her beloved husband at age 28 (p. 10). Why did their marriage have to end? How does this story set the stage for Shlomtzion's own story?
2. Why were Shlomtzion and Yair unable to go to the Western Wall and Mount Moriah as young children? What then changed?
3. Shlomtzion recalls going to see *The Parent Trap* and other movies at the Edison Theater. This theater traditionally marked the border between religious and secular neighborhoods in Jerusalem. For many years it served as a cultural center, with artists from all over the world coming to perform. But starting in the 50s, the ultra-Orthodox protested against the site; then in 2006, it was sold to the Satmar Hasidic sect, who plan to build apartment buildings on the site for its members. Do these tensions between religious and secular, so prevalent in Jerusalem today, play a role in this novel? Explain.
4. As a teenager, Shlomtzion travels to NY with her family after the Six Day War. What surprises her about New York? How is her life there different from her life in Israel?
5. Consider Edna Tzur's religious journey (p. 34). How is it similar to and different from Shlomtzion's? Do you know anyone who went through a similarly extreme transformation?
6. When Yair defers marriage to her for the army, Shlomtzion engages in a rigorous learning program that she refers to as "my own boot camp" (p. 41). What does she mean by this analogy? In what way is it apt?
7. Why is Shlomtzion "revolted" by the sight of the men dancing at the kotel on Simchat Torah (p. 51)? What is so appalling about their behavior? How do you think you would have reacted to such a scene?
8. What is the impact of the Yom Kippur War on Israeli society, as seen through Shlomtzion's eyes (p. 72)? How does her description accord with anything you might have known previously about this period of Israeli history?
9. What drives Shlomtzion's involvement in the Gush Emunim settlement efforts in the 1970s (p. 82)? Do you think that similar worldviews and aspirations drive the settler movement in Israel today? What, if anything, has changed?



10. At several points in the story, Shlomtzion images another life she might have led – in New York's Upper West Side, or in a settlement, or with Rosy. How would she have been different in each of these situations? Do you think she would have been happy?
11. How do Shlomtzion and Maya react differently to the murder of Ariel's close friend (p. 148)? How does this highlight the differences between the political views of mother and daughter, especially in the wake of the Oslo accords?
12. How does Elon treat the Rabin assassination, which rocked Israeli society in 1995? How is this tragedy foreshadowed at the end of the novel?
13. What revelations does Shlomtzion receive from Yair and Leah when she visits them in Tirza at the end of the novel? Do you think Yair is right in his assessment of why they never married?
14. To what does the title of this book refer – in its original context, and as Shlomtzion interprets it both personally and politically?
15. Based on what you know about Emuna Elon (see bio), with which perspective portrayed in this book is she most likely to agree?



REVIEW QUOTES:

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

“The depth of the characters and their complex love-hate relationships, a subtle plot portraying life in a religious community, and the background of modern history in an ancient land distinguish this first-rate debut.”

--Barbara Bibel, *Booklist*

“A surprising, fascinating novel about Israeli society.”

--*La'Isha*

“Emuna Elon knows how to do something that can be said of very few authors writing in Hebrew today: tell a story. One with fleshed-out characters, a story line, surprises, plot twists, little poignant dramas but also some belly laughs, a familiar background and episodes from recent history -- all this combined with a sub-plot that raises questions in the reader's mind that are far from simple.”

--*Ha'aretz*

“From the Six Day War to the assassination of Itzhak Rabin Emuna Elon weaves the history, problems, joy and sacrifices inherent in Israeli life. Far more than a love story, the political, social and religious atmosphere in Israel is integrated into the narrative -- a tour de force of great story telling.”

--Molly Abramowitz, *Lilith Magazine*

