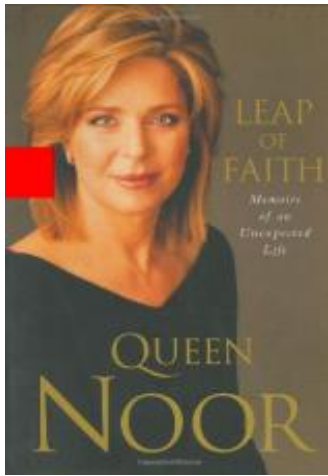


# Leap of Faith: Memoirs of an Unexpected Life

by Queen Noor

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## About the Book

Born into a distinguished Arab-American family, Lisa Halaby joined the first co-ed class at Princeton University and graduated in 1974 with a degree in architecture and urban planning. Two years later, while visiting Jordan, she was casually introduced to King Hussein, a leader widely admired in the Arab world as a voice of moderation and a proponent of peace. Their next meeting some time later escalated into a secret, whirlwind courtship, and Lisa Halaby became Noor Al Hussein, Queen of Jordan.

In **Leap of Faith**, Queen Noor speaks with eloquence and candor about her journey from a naïve young bride navigating the intricacies of a royal court to a mother, humanitarian activist, and partner to a monarch. As she gradually took on the mantle of queen, Noor's joys and challenges grew. After a heartbreaking miscarriage, she gave birth to four children. Meshing the demands of motherhood with the commitments of her position often proved difficult, but she kept her young children by her side, even while flying the world with her husband in his relentless quest for peace. This mission reaped satisfying rewards, including greater Arab unity and a peace treaty with Israel, and suffered such terrible setbacks as the Gulf War and the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin.

Dramatic and inspiring, **Leap of Faith** is the story of a young American woman's transition to a queen. It is a compelling portrait of the late King Hussein and his lifelong effort to bring peace to his war-torn region, and an insider's view of the growing gulf between the United States and the Arab nations. It is the refreshingly candid account of a mother coming to terms with the demands the king's role as a world statesman placed on her family's private life. But most of all **Leap of Faith** is a love story about a woman who lost her heart to a king, and to his people.

## Discussion Guide

1. In the Acknowledgments section Queen Noor states, "This book was written in the spirit of reconciliation, which I hope will contribute to a greater awareness, especially in the West, of events that have shaped the modern Middle East,

and encourage a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges facing the Arab world." Prior to reading **Leap of Faith**, what was your perception of Jordan and the Middle East? Did reading this book change your opinion in any way? How is it different to get a personal perspective rather than journalistic accounts in the media?

2. What circumstances in Queen Noor's background-*ie*, her Arab-American heritage, her family's international travels, etc-gave her an advantage in assuming the role of Jordan's queen? What, if any, were detriments?

3. In one instance Queen Noor recalls her "first impressions of Jordan" (pg 2) as being "overwhelmed by an extraordinary sensation of belonging and an almost mystical sense of peace." Were you surprised at how quickly she embraced life in Jordan? Why or why not?

4. What do you think attracted Queen Noor and King Hussein to one another? Queen Noor admits that she agonized over her decision of whether or not to marry King Hussein. One of her concerns was that his "own people might feel antagonistic toward their King, even betrayed, by his choice of an American woman, albeit one with Arab roots" (pg 82). How, ultimately, did she know it was the right decision to marry King Hussein?

5. Queen Noor reveals that the "most precious gift" (pg 95) the King ever gave her was her name, which means "light" in Arabic. As she said, "Over the next few weeks and months, a transition gradually took place in my mind, in my dreams. I became Noor." Why did this bestowing of a new name have such an impact on her? Why do you think she was willing to change her name?

6. "My attachment to Jordan and Jordanians came very naturally, but it was harder to define exactly what my role should be in terms of contribution to the well-being of the country" (pg 128). What role did Queen Noor ultimately define for herself? Were you surprised that King Hussein encouraged his wife in the pursuit of a non-traditional role for a queen?

7. The marriage of Queen Noor and King Hussein was inescapably intertwined with the politics of the region and the world. "My memories of those personally challenging times are inextricable from my memories of the political dramas we were engaged in" (pg 139). How did she make her marriage work under these circumstances? If you had been in her shoes what, if anything, would you have done differently?

8. When Queen Noor told her family of her decision to marry King Hussein, her mother and father were both concerned for her future but for different reasons. Her mother "expressed her concern that our culturally different backgrounds might prevent us from finding a common language." Her father's anxieties "were more political" (pg 91), wondering if his daughter could handle the intricacies of a Byzantine royal court and fearing for her safety amid the turbulence of the Middle East. How did these concerns-personal and political-come into play in their daughter's life as Jordan's queen?

9. During the Gulf War, Queen Noor visited the United States and believed that her husband "was being made out to be an enemy of the United States, when he was anything but" (pg 318). What was your perception of King Hussein as a ruler in the Middle East? Discuss the significance of King Hussein's friendship with Prime Minister Rabin of Israel.

10. Upon her marriage to King Hussein, Queen Noor found herself stepmother to his eight children, and she later gave birth to four children of her own. What challenges did she face being both mother and stepmother to twelve children, and how did she overcome them?

11. What surprised you the most about Queen Noor?

12. What will you most remember from **Leap of Faith**?

## Author Bio

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