



***Twenty Two Years to Life, Mohammed Massoud Morsi***  
**(Mohammed Hussein Miheasen)**

### **Summary**

What is the one thing you wish for more than anything else in the world? And what would you do if that one thing, once granted, was taken away from you?

Fathi and Farida are a couple still in love since their rainstorm meeting two decades earlier. Together they journey from one gated city to the next – sometimes of their own volition, sometimes with a gun to their backs – all the while praying for that one thing. And when their life takes an even more dramatic turn, Fathi takes the only course of action that is left to take...

Based on a true story, this tale will make you grateful for every little thing you have taken for granted.

### **About the Author**

Mohammed Massoud Morsi was born in Egypt, raised in Denmark, and has since travelled the world extensively. With a passion for writing and photography, he has dedicated the last 15 years to photojournalism and to documenting the life experiences of himself and others. Fluent in Arabic, English and Danish, and conversant in several other languages, Morsi says *"To be passionate about the type of photography I do and the writing my soul desires, I need to open all doors of communication. I am more of a storyteller than anything else. Working with a camera from the age of 7, I have been inspired to tell my own stories, tell other people's stories. I have, in writing as well, explored an understanding of several topics such as happiness and connection, vulnerability and humanity. I am always searching to know why. I want to know what the truth is..."*

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## Questions for Discussion

1. *Intifada: the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The first lasted from 1987 to 1993, and the second began in 2000.* What was your understanding of the Middle East crisis prior to starting this book?
2. The novel begins with the story of Fathi and Farida's love, and their wish to have children after ten years of trying. Discuss the universality of this human need, even in the harsh reality of an occupied Palestine.
3. Fathi and Farida travel to Canada to see a fertility specialist. Consider the culture shock the couple experience – the hospitality, climate and priorities – and reflect on the lasting impact the trip has on Fathi when he returns to Palestine.
4. Discuss the symbolism of chickens and eggs in the novel.
5. The combined effects of Israeli occupation, withdrawal, and bombardment give rise to a hotbed of destruction. In addition to the destruction of physical environments, what other forms of destruction are evident in the depiction of Palestinian life?
6. How is the reader positioned to view characters such as Khaled who engineer dealings across the border, trading business and power through tunnels and connections, and defying the Israeli blockades?
7. Fathi's friend Mohammed experienced great loss with the death of his first wife Zeinab and his two sons in a fighter jet bombing. This is but one example in the novel of the loss of civilian life in the military conflict. How do the characters process grief – both firsthand, secondhand, and that of the collective – when loss is so commonplace?
8. What is the significance of the character Aboud, the young boy Fathi fed and drove to Gaza and who later reappears?
9. Fathi's son Hamada is a miracle to the couple. Discuss how Fathi embraces fatherhood and how he is forced to educate his son about the conflict surrounding them.
10. Fathi recounts his father's fate on page 69; his father, after losing his wife and two older children in a shelling, had the event etched in his soul, eventually compelling him to smuggle himself over onto the Israeli side so he could exact his revenge. Describe the significance of this foreshadowing, and the cycle it depicts.

11. What parallels can be drawn between the slaughter of a lamb (by butcher Abu Ahmed before the city is attacked) and Hamada's death (where he is almost completely decapitated in the knock-on-the-roof bomb)?
12. The sea and sky are recurrent backdrops in the novel, from Hamada's love of surfing to the depictions of heaven and hell after Hamada's death. How is this imagery used to portray the novel's themes? Contrast the natural imagery to that of the bombed cityscape of Gaza. What comment can be made about man-made forces?
13. On page 75, neighbour Hani whispers 'I haven't found an answer for why our stars look different to [the Israelis]'' before Fathi looks up and notices a drone in the night. What commonalities and differences are highlighted by this scene? What is the relevance of the stars in the opening and closing chapters?
14. What role does the media play in spurring on the conflict? Discuss the modernity and impact of Benjamin Netanyahu's tweets (page 62). How fair is the suggestion that the media ignores the 'Palestinian's (sic) right to defend themselves against their occupier', with the West peddling 'propaganda', e.g. the BBC acting as 'Bibi's Best Channel' (page 97)?
15. The ending, in essence, depicts a civilian engaging in warfare in revenge for the loss of a loved one. How is the reader positioned to feel about Fathi's choices: between life and death, between existing and seeking vengeance?
16. Did this novel make you think differently about any of the major conflicts currently taking place in the world?

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*Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel*, David Grossman (Macmillan)

*Benang: From the Heart*, Kim Scott (Fremantle Press)