



To Keep the Sun Alive: A Novel by Rabeah Ghaffari Reading Group Guide

1. Rabeah Ghaffari writes, "He yearned for that unity, that brotherhood, that sanctuary. He longed for the dignity of belonging." One of the biggest themes in *To Keep the Sun Alive* is the search for acceptance and unity. How do you think this idea affects each character's actions differently?
2. How is parenthood explored in the novel? Discuss in particular how parent-child bonds inform the development of Jamsheed, Madjid, and Nasreen.
3. What symbolism does the eclipse hold in the novel? Why do you think Rabeah Ghaffari chose the title *To Keep the Sun Alive*?
4. Discuss the roles that faith (or lack thereof) and tradition play in the novel. How are they used as a means of escape? In what ways do they alienate some characters?
5. Discuss the juxtaposition that occurs at the end of the novel with Ashura and Chaharshambeh Suri falling on the same day.
6. "He understood why his father surrounded himself with the finery of a foreign country. It was light and capricious, weightless and inconsequential. It was everything this place was not."

Discuss the weight of this statement. What do you think Madjid means by this? Why do you think Shazdehpour rejects his own culture?

7. When discussing the factions that began to emerge before the revolution in Iran, Rabeah Ghaffari writes, "**What made them all a threat was that, despite their differences, they were united against the establishment itself...**" In what ways can this statement relate to current events?
8. "The one who you say least deserves your kindness is the one who needs it most"

How does this statement ring true throughout the novel? Do you think events would have changed if certain characters were afforded more kindness?

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9. What role does the theme of dignity have in the story? How is it defined differently by each character? How does each character maintain their own dignity?
 10. In what ways are Jamsheed and Madjid's relationship similar to the relationship of the judge and the mullah?
 11. Beyond the valid conviction that all human beings should have equal rights under the laws of any given nation, what does it mean to be a strong woman? How does that strength manifest itself in the women of the novel? In faith, in familial relations, in friendship, etc. What happens to societies that dismiss or de-value these qualities?
 12. How is Madjid, a young man who examines his life with great care, affected and shaped by the women he encounters (his mother, Nasreen, the prostitute)?
 13. What purpose do the tales throughout (the war of the lion and the ass, the imperial sugar factory, the apothecary, etc.) serve? How does storytelling help us understand our history and our present?