
Redemption in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

From the wealthiest neighborhood in Kabul to the poverty of San Francisco, Khaled Hosseini creates a story of redemption which transcends cultures and time in *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini uses the dynamics of father-son relationships to express a theme of atonement, using a web of tragedy to bring his readers the assurance that there is always "a way to be good again" (92).

Hosseini begins the novel through a image which synopizes Amir's relationship with his father: sitting outside his father's study solemnly soaking in second-hand affections as his father jokes and laughs with his business partners. Amir's desperate need for his father's approval is the driving force behind his actions as a child. He grows to resent both himself and his closest companion Hassan, a Hazara boy that works as a servant in Amir's home. Amir's father withholds love only to bestow graciously on Hassan. In response to his father's great act of charity towards Hassan, Amir admits his feeling of resentment. As Hassan is told Amir's father is financing a cosmetic surgery as a birthday gift to Hassan, Amir admits: "I wished I too had some kind of scar that would beget Baba's sympathy. It wasn't fair. Hassan hadn't done anything to earn Baba's affections; he'd just been born with that stupid harelip" (41). Amir's angry confession foreshadows the depths that father-son relationships takes on in Hosseini's story of redemption.

Amir's need for approval from his father is so great that it is ultimately his downfall. Amir triumphantly recalls after winning a kite flying competition "I saw Baba on our roof. He was standing on the edge, pumping both of his fists. Hollering and clapping. That right there was the single greatest moment of my twelve years of life, seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last.". He believes that he has finally earned the love of his father who has kept him at arms length, possibly finding restitution for the death of his mother during childbirth that he felt blamed for.

Amir achieves what he has always sought after, but at a price that changes the lives of all those around him. By merely standing by as his most loyal companion sacrifices himself to preserve that fleeting affection, and through his attempts to ease his guilt Amir accumulates sins which for many years seem unatonable. Amir selfishly admits to himself , "Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba." (77) . Amir is unaware what a great price he has paid for that affection.

Baba's approval is short lived and comes with a sharp sting of guilt. As his father gloats about Amir's victory, the blue kite which he so proudly displays is a reminder to Amir of his betrayal. Soon the glamour of the kite race victory dulls, and Amir can not face the weight of his sin. Like

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the blue kite, Amir's once great friend becomes a reminder of his failures, and in an attempt to purge himself of the guilt Amir lies, manipulating the people around him and sending both Hassan and his father away from their home as the country around them begins to change along with their home.

In the face of Afghani revolution Amir's father flees Afghanistan and the life he has built to ensure the safety of his son. Baba lowers himself from a prominent business man in the most beautiful home in Kabul, to dwelling in fuel tankers and dark, rat infested basements. While Amir believes his father is indifferent to him, this sacrifice shows the care that Baba has for Amir.

When Amir and his father reach the safety of San Francisco, Hosseini's story of redemption takes major turns in culture, as does the structure of Amir and his father's relationship. America serves as an escape for Amir where he follows his ambitions as a writer and momentarily evades the guilt which overwhelmed him in Afghanistan. While Amir finds comfort in California his father longs for his life in Kabul; Amir reflects on this transition when he shares that, "For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his" (129).

Through the trials of surviving on the lower crust of American society the relationship between Amir and his father transforms. The tension which ruled their interactions in Afghanistan grows into a respect as Amir grows into a man, shaped by the influences of both America and his home country. At Amir's graduation from American high school, Baba assures him that, "I am mofakhir, Amir ...Proud."(131).

Amir's yearning for his father's approval and affection was so encompassing he sacrificed his most loyal friend to fleeting admiration. Then when at last his father expresses his pride in Amir, but criticized his choice in collegial majors, he can not forget the unatoned sins which he attempted to leave in Kabul as he shares, "I did not want to sacrifice for Baba anymore. The last time I had done that, I had damned myself." (135). Amir finds this place of contentment as his father's life come to an end.

In the absence of his father's affections, young Amir found a father figure in Baba's closest friend Rahim Khan. A kind and inspiring man, Kahn supported Amir's writing as a child, but as he returns to Amir's life after Baba's death his motives are not as lighthearted. Kahn, in his final days, meets with Amir and brings to light sins which were left unatoned in the now war-torn Afghanistan.

Hosseini opens his novel with Amir's reflection in Khan's call, his claim that "there is a way to be good again" (2), and the sins which he has run away from for over a decade. What Amir could not have foretold was the enormity of the sins which he would be held accountable. Khan confronts Amir's betrayal of Hassan, but along with that furthers the story's theme of redemption

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through the father-son relationship. Throughout the novel Amir is reminded that "there was a brotherhood between people who had fed from the same breast, a kinship that not even time could break" (31), Amir had betrayed that brotherhood and Rahim Khan shared with him the depth of that betrayal. Khan tells Amir that "Your father, like you, was a tortured soul, Amir jan." (301), both Amir and his father carried the weight of unredeemed sins against their closest and most loyal companions. Rahim Khan informs Amir that while he had betrayed and sacrificed Hassan for his own needs, his father also had sins which needed atonement. Hassan was not the son of Baba's closest friend, but instead the product of Amir's father's infidelity with Ali's wife. Hassan was Amir's brother.

Khan then fulfills his promise of the opportunity for redemption, not only for Amir's sins but also for those of his father as he shares Hassan's fate and commissions Amir to redeem himself. Rahim Khan shares with Amir that Hassan grew into a man and found a wife and even had a child, a boy named Sohrab. The violence and corruption of Afghanistan made victims of Amir's brother and his wife as they were publicly executed without cause, leaving Sohrab to find refuge in an orphanage. Through this young boy ripped by tragedy, Khan gives Amir a chance to redeem the sins which have held he and his father captive. He commissions Amir to find Sohrab and bring him to safety, out of the war-torn slums of Afghanistan and atone for his crimes against his own blood by saving this boy, his nephew.

Amir's journey to save Sohrab brings him face to face with the man who had raped Amir's closest companion and unknown brother. Hosseini creates a rise to redemption as the man who in that alley way twenty years prior claimed that there is "nothing wrong with cowardice as long as it comes with prudence" (275), now stood to fight to the death. Facing the threat which led him to betray his brother, Amir sacrifices himself, being almost killed for the son of his brother whom he once exclaimed was not a friend but a servant (34). Trampled, close to death, but alive Amir sacrifices himself for Sohrab, atoning for the sacrifice Hassan made for him. With the guilt lifted, Amir saves Sohrab as much as Sohrab saves Amir as they flee to find sanctuary for the boy.

Although Khan commissions Amir to bring Sohrab to the safety of an orphanage outside Afghanistan, Amir finds that the missionaries that were expected to take in Sohrab were nonexistent. In his last dying wishes, Khan weaves the fates of Amir and Sohrab. Amir understands that Khan did not plan for Amir's journey to be his restoration, but that this boy, his nephew and the last part of Hassan, to be his atonement. Amir and his wife, desperate for a child, begin the frustrating and confusing journey of the adoption of a war refugee. Amir reflects saying that "I brought Hassan's son from Afghanistan to America, lifting him from the certainty of turmoil and dropping him in a turmoil of uncertainty." (356).

In that turmoil of uncertainty Amir and his wife do their best to accommodate and love Sohrab.

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Introverted and traumatized the novel does not end it a blaze of good triumphantly defeating evil, but instead ends in a note of hope. Amir shares that "I wondered if that was how forgiveness was budded, not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night." (359) as he regards that his guilt has been replaced with a love for Sohrab. Hosseini does not regard atonement or restoration as a spontaneous act. Amir is not freed of the guilt which was built through a web of cowardice and deception through one valiant effort. The Kite Runner uses an intricately woven rug of father-son relationships to bring its characters the relief of guilt which was brought on through that same intricate weaving.

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