

The kite runner: the significance to identity

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The Kite Runner: The Significance to Identity Herbert Chang Block E English

Mr. Wall Who are we as individuals? This is a question that we contemplate, often yet unsuccessfully, without arriving at a definite answer. Our identities are a unique and complicated thing- not only are they influenced by many factors, they are also constantly evolving as we move from goal to goal, aspiration to aspiration. What makes each of us unique in personality is our different background and experiences, the most notable factor our families. Since the day we were born, our families have influenced us, both directly and indirectly, ingraining cultural, gender, and religious beliefs into us. In The Kite Runner, the ingraining of identity due to family influences can be most easily perceived in the many relationships Khaled Hosseini created, for instance Baba having strong moral integrity due to his father's occupation as a judge, but it is most strongly seen in the relationship that Baba and Amir share. Using the theme of morality and the abuse of power, Khaled Hosseini exemplifies the importance of family on the societal and moral identity. " Do you[Baba] always have to be the hero?(115)" One of the most defining characteristics of Baba is his sense of morality. One of Baba's biggest principles is his view on theft; he believes that " there is only one sin... and that is theft. (18)" Amir's life was influenced by the betrayal of Baba's key principle, with him living in regret since the winter of 1975. Amir's identity is largely based on the guilt of betraying Hassan's trust and robbing everyone, Baba, Ali, and Hassan himself, of their " right to the truth. " Because of Baba's moral principles, Amir carried the weight of his theft through his lifetime. Although Amir's guilt was directly derived from Baba's influence, his aspirations were indirectly influenced- Amir always looked up to Baba, and

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deep inside wished to embody the principles that Baba held dear, to be the hero Baba was. Betrayal is both despised, yet at the same time well known, by Amir and Baba, for they have both committed certain betrayals by abusing with the power of knowledge. Because Baba was privy that Hassan was his illegitimate child and could not openly care for him, he "took it on [Amir] instead- the socially legitimate half." Baba abused his power on Amir due to his guilt towards his affair with Sanaubar, trying to turn him into a soccer loving, Buzkashi watching son- his own image. The abuse of power manifested in many incidents later on due to this premise, primarily in the form of one holding knowledge over someone else. Amir abused Hassan in his literacy; he tricking Hassan into thinking "imbecile" meant "smart." Baba abused Amir due to his knowledge of his affair, Amir abused Hassan due to the latter's illiteracy; similarly, the guilt he would feel about such an incident with reflect on what Baba felt when abusing Amir. The abuse of power has profound effects on one's identity. After getting a new bike for his birthday, Khaled Hossiene had Baba say "we [Amir and Baba] could go for a ride." It was "an invitation, but only a half-hearted one." Even though both Amir and Baba, despite their "different spheres of existence," tried very hard to bond, yet again would the presence of Baba's own hypocrisy bar them from connecting. Amir's jealousy as a kid germinated from Baba's abuse towards Amir in conjunction with Baba's partialness towards Hassan. As a child, Amir's aspiration was to please Baba, and every time he tried, despite success, it did not last. After winning the kite fighting tournament, the brief bliss experienced between them disappeared when Amir asked about "getting new servants." At most, only a temporary bridge was built

between them, broken by Baba's knowledge of Hassan's parentage. His identity drowned again and again in Baba's disappointment. " A look of disgust swept across his rain-soaked face. It was the same look he'd given me when, as a kid, I'd fall, scrape me knees, and cry. It was the crying that brought it on then, the crying that brought it on now. " You're twenty-two years old, Amir! A grown man! You..." he opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again, reconsidered. Above us, rain drummed on the canvas awning. " What's going to happen to you, you say? All those years, that's what I was trying to teach you, how to never have to ask that question. " As an adult, Amir turned out very differently than what Baba wanted him to be. Although this could symbolize Baba's lack of influence on Amir, the difference in Amir's identity and Baba's expectations in fact suggests the opposite. Amir became a writer, and he " would stand his ground. " He " didn't want to sacrifice for Baba anymore. The last time I[Amir] had done that, " he had damned himself. Already, Amir has begun to take the first steps towards what Baba wanted him to learn- knowing what to do for himself. Amir was also influenced by past experience of achieving for Baba instead of himself, and as a result, turned his identity towards becoming a writer. Even without directly teaching Amir what to do, Baba's moral character complimented by his experience with his son would influence the identity that Amir manifested as an adult. Both indirectly and directly, Amir was influenced

Family is truly important to each and one of our identities. Whether it be the constant fawning over us, or the lack in presence of our parents, families will influence the people we become. In the end, Amir saw himself as the one battling with the bear upon saving Sohrab, as the " hero"

his dad once was. As we look up to our parents or people we see as role models, we imitate their successes, learn from their mistakes; we stand beside them for what is right, and create our own opinions; we live as they wish us to, or fight their expectations. Hosseini used *The Kite Runner* as a vessel to emphasize the importance of family. Without family, Baba would not be moral, Hassan not a loyal friend, Amir not a redeemer. Without family, we would not be who we are today, and therefore, without doubt, identity depends on family.