

Kites, Abortion, and Redemption

Friendship. Omission. Betrayal. Redemption.

These are just a few words that capture the heart of Khaled Hosseini's novel, The Kite Runner.

This story, like any good tale, serves at least two purposes. First, it *interests* the reader with its constant turns, its suspense, and the unexpected. It also interests the reader with the relationships and emotions experienced by the characters; the reader is able to relate to these. Second, it *instructs* the reader by conveying the psychology of human behaviour. It illustrates that in life there exists both truth and lies, right and wrong (and that consequences flow from each). It teaches about the reality of life: how some things are fair while others are unfair, and that there is both struggle and triumph.

For those who wish to enjoy reading Hosseini's book, rest assured: I won't reveal the plot of The Kite Runner here. This essay is designed to address the second purpose of stories, that of instruction. In particular, I will use it to shed light on abortion. That may seem like a stretch: How is a tale about two Afghani boys related to abortion? Well, it's not. But the universal lessons behind it are:

Lesson #1: When we do wrong, we tend to blame the reminder of our misdeed rather than ourselves.

In The Kite Runner, the reader learns of a character's shocking act of betraying a friend. The guilty party is overcome with remorse, haunted by images and memories. He feels as though his life is being drained out of him. He desperately wants relief. But he refuses to verbalize what he has done. He refuses to repent to the victim. He refuses to seek help with healing.

Every day he is burdened by his dark, dirty secret. The weight of the memory of his mistake feels like it is suffocating him, so he tries to forget it; he tries to go on living like it didn't happen. But it *did* happen. And his friend's presence is a reminder of that. So he hurts his friend, hoping his friend will hurt him back—hoping his friend will give him the punishment that his innate sense of justice craves. But his friend doesn't, and his pain grows all the more. Yet again, he lashes out at his friend. Why? If he regrets what he did in the first place, why add insult to injury? For this reason: his friend's innocence is an *agonizing* reminder of his own guilt.

When we are surrounded by darkness, we close our eyes at exposure to light.

So it is with abortion. How often do we live in misery, silently suffering with regret and pain? Whether our guilt is direct (we committed abortion) or indirect (we *permitted* abortion), we know, intuitively, that we have done something terribly wrong. We have violated our humanity. But we're convinced that, if we admit to this wrongdoing, ensuing pain will be unbearable.

How often, then, do we refuse to take ownership of our guilt in order to make the pain go away? If someone, or something, reminds us of what we've done, the pain resurfaces. Therefore, having found some semblance of comfort in denial, we blame our pain not on our past choices but on their reminders. That may give temporary relief, but the source of our pain remains.

It doesn't have to be this way, as the final lesson reveals.

Lesson #2: In trying to win the approval of another, we may harm the innocent around us.

The jacket of Hosseini's novel mentions this facet of his story: "Twelve-year-old Amir is desperate to win the approval of his father." The choices Amir makes in life are driven by that yearning. Amir, like most of us, has good intentions. But isn't it possible to long for one thing and, in the process, harm another?

Think of a pregnant teenager who seeks her boyfriend's love; or a college student who desperately desires her parents' approval; or a wife who craves her husband's affections. In any of these situations, an unexpected pregnancy might seem disastrous, and abortion may be viewed as the means to maintain, or even achieve, one's relationship goal. Does this legitimize wrong behaviour? Certainly not. Having particular hopes does not justify killing innocent children who appear to interfere with those desires; however, this understanding does shed light on why people behave as they do: Most people make wrong choices not because they desire evil, but because they want one thing and, in the process of gaining it, commit wrong behaviour.

Lesson #3: Doing what's right often isn't easy, but do it anyways.

The Kite Runner illustrates this principle by showing a person who behaves wrongly because of the difficulty of doing what is right. Later, it shows a person who does what is right, knowing it will be very difficult. What follows from the former is short-term gain coupled with long-term pain. What follows from the latter is short-term *pain* coupled with long-term *gain*.

How often, with abortion, is someone choosing a procedure that seems *easier* than carrying through with a pregnancy, only to be filled with a lifetime of regret? Even if no regret is felt, an innocent life is nonetheless taken.

When deciding what to do in a crisis pregnancy, one mustn't ask what seems easiest; instead, one must ask what *is right*. Only with that question will the unborn be guaranteed protection.

Lesson #4: No matter what we've done, there is hope: We *can* change for the better.

In The Kite Runner, a wise old mentor, knowing of another man's dark past, offers this insight: "There is a way to be good again."

So it is with abortion: there *is* a way to be good again. Whether we had an abortion, or helped a friend obtain one; whether we referred for abortion, or remained silent when a human being's life was on the line; whether we performed abortions or promoted them—we were wrong. We cannot change the past, but we *can* change the present and the future through how we deal with that past. Denial or acknowledgement? Lies or truth? Suppression or release? Long-term pain or lasting peace? There is a way to be good again.

What we do now is obviously too late for the victims of abortion, but it is *not* too late for those who remain living. We don't help the living by staying in denial. We help the living by doing for them that which, deep down, we wish we had done for those in our past.

In the final days of his life, the mentor in The Kite Runner shares this wisdom: "[T]his is what I want you to understand, that good, *real* good, was born out of... remorse... [T]rue redemption is... when guilt leads to good."

With every act of betrayal, with every moment of inaction that should have been action, with each occasion to speak that was replaced with silence, with every mistake, there is before us an opportunity—to find the redemption that awaits us.

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