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The Guilt Trip

The Kite Runner, by Khaled Hosseini, is a heartbreaking story about betrayal and friendship. The idea of “being good again” drives the book and allows the audience to sympathize with Amir. Amir (the main character) seeks a way to be good again and right his wrongs. He wants to live up to his dad’s expectations and that causes him to do things that he regrets in the future and his guilt takes over him. Amir goes through this metamorphosis and it makes him a better person. He starts off a caterpillar, he is a coward and only tries to feed off his father’s attention. The regret (of being a bad person which makes him want to make things right), is the cocoon phase of the metamorphosis. It allows him to mature as a person and transform into a better human, like how caterpillars transform into butterflies. Amir was a caterpillar that made way too many mistakes. So, then karma blends in with the metamorphosis. Since Amir had done so many wrong things like betraying Hassan and breaking 2 life long friendship, his punishment and his suffering during the metamorphosis are equivalent and balances out his mistakes. These forms of karma came in various ways. Amir almost getting beaten to death by Assef seems is a form of karma that felt right. Since Amir caused hell for Hassan, his punishment seems deserving. Karma allows Amir to get his redemption despite going through a treacherous process like getting beat up by Assef. So, in The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini juggles with ideas of

regret/guilt and redemption, he makes 'chain-like event patterns' driven by regret and then uses the idea of karma to reassure and staple Amir's redemption.

Regret is the main word of the story, it is what drives Amir to be good again. The main parts of Amir's childhood are guilt driven. Amir's lingering regret stems from many events in his childhood that he cannot "live down." His guilt first emerges after the kite competition where Hassan is getting raped in the Alley by the main antagonist Assef. Amir could have stood up for Hassan, but he doesn't. "I could step into the alley, stand up for Hassan -- the way he'd stood up for me" - "In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me." With these two quotes, the readers get to see into Amir's mind and how it functions. Amir is the polar opposite of Hassan, he was raised up as a spoiled boy and his bravery reflects upon that. Amir states that Hassan "stood up for me all those times in the past", but he isn't able to return the favor due to his cowardness. Amir's guilt emerges because he can't stand the fact that he is a coward and he acknowledges that Hassan is the better person. Amir is so immature that he interprets his guilt in a bad and selfish manner. Instead, he directs the guilt towards Hassan in a non-passive way that makes Amir look like a hypocrite. Amir should have tried to make things right, instead he continues to view Hassan as a lesser person than him. "Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba." - "He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?" With these quotes, the readers get to see the impact Amir's guilt was having on him. Since Amir isn't adapted to the real world and only focused on getting his father's attention, he reflects the guilt back at Hassan and to make it seem right in his head. He convinces himself that what he does is for his dad to reassure himself that he truly isn't the bad guy, rather that "Hassan was the price" he had to pay. So, Amir's guilt emerges due to his cowardness and Amir

approaches dealing with the guilt by reflecting it on Hassan. The guilt trip doesn't just stop there, the guilt of being a coward forces him to do even worse things which leads to even more regrets. Amir makes foolish decisions over and over again that causes his guilt to intensify. Amir's guilt trip is basically him not knowing how to deal with his guilt and doing reckless things that Amir thinks will omit him from the guilt. Rather the recklessness impacts his whole family and Amir's guilt isn't omitted at all. On the contrary, his guilt trip starts again, so his recklessness was done for no reason. Amir needed a way to get rid of his guilt for being a coward, so he tries to get rid of Amir. He successfully does get off Amir, but in the process breaks his whole family's heart.

"That was when I understood the depth of the pain I had caused, the blackness of the grief I had brought onto everyone." Amir states this after he witnesses his father cry and beg to the same people he had treated badly. Which is really ironic due to the reason that Amir got Hassan kicked out so he could "win Baba". Instead of winning Baba over, he indirectly breaks his heart and breaks a life long friendship just because he couldn't handle his guilt in the right way. Unlike Amir's respect for Hassan, Baba loved Ali to death which is evident when he cries his heart out when Ali and Hassan leave. So, when Amir realizes that his actions had deep and bad effects on everyone. This causes his guilt to multiply. Amir makes the mistake of trying to not confront his guilt head-on, rather he ignores it and deflects it at Hassan. His recklessness also had other effects that pass beyond the guilt. When Baba breaks his rule about forgiving people, Amir feels the full blow since he believed that Baba had never forgiven him about his mother's death but Baba forgave Hassan.

"Haven't Baba sat me on his lap and said those words to me? Then how could he just forgive Hassan? And if Baba could forgive that, then why couldn't he forgive me for not being the son he'd always wanted?"

Amir's recklessness indirectly causes Baba to break his own rule and Amir felt responsible. He feels a tiny spec of anger towards Hassan for being able to get forgiven, but his confusion overshadows the anger. At that point in time, Amir realizes his plans to "win Baba" had failed. All Amir wanted was to get his Dad all to himself, rather his Dad begged and cried to get back the people Amir had done harm to. His previous guilt (of being a coward) then combines with the new guilt of letting his Dad down and failing once again. This combination puts Amir in a hole of sorrow and despair. When Amir realizes that he could never be "the son he'd always wanted", his guilt takes a new form. It embodies Baba's disappointment for Amir, causing the guilt cycle to increase and increase until Amir finds a way of being good again.

The regret/guilt chain continue to grow larger and larger, as time passes for Amir. Amir's guilt reaches a new level when he realizes his dad is the opposite of him. This occurs in the story when Amir and Baba are in the car getting transported out of Afghanistan. The Russian soldier tries to rape a helpless woman and Baba stands up for her. "Tell him I'll take a thousand of his bullets before I let this indecency take place" - "Haven't I taught you anything?". Baba stands up for a woman who couldn't defend herself. The soldier had a gun and he was ready to sacrifice his life to prove a point and stand up for what's right to stop "this indecency" he claimed. Amir did the complete opposite of this. He didn't stand up for the helpless(Hassan), like what he dad did. Baba was against all odds and he still chose to gamble his life for a person he didn't even know. While, Amir couldn't even stand up for his own buddy. At that point in time, Amir realizes he is truly a coward, and his guilt grows. He realizes that Hassan and Baba are more alike than him. Baba did something that Hassan did for Amir. Hassan stood up for Amir more times than Amir could count, like when he scared Assef off with his slingshot. Baba and Hassan's similarities

bother Amir. Amir knows he will never live up to his Dad. All the things that Baba wants Amir does, he fails, he can't play soccer, he isn't courageous and strong, rather the opposite. Hassan is completely different, he suits the perfect son role that Baba had envisioned for Amir. Hassan is brave, daring, and most importantly not a thief. Amir is a thief, he stole Baba's fatherly love for Hassan. Amir's guilt grows and grows because of this. He is guilty because Hassan was the perfect fit for Baba's envision and Amir caused him to leave. He is guilty because he did the opposite thing that Baba would have wanted. So, the guilt keeps on adding up as Amir goes through his life. It's very interesting how a moment of Baba showing bravery, the opposite of Amir, foreshadows the fact that Hassan is Amir's step-brother. It's surprising that Amir didn't catch on to it when his dad scolded him for bringing up the idea of replacing Hassan. When the fact of Hassan being Baba's son emerges, it changes the whole outlook on the story. Knowing that Amir's selfishness caused a father to never see his son again, makes Amir seem like an even worse person than he already is. Not only does he break a life of friendship of Ali and Baba, but he also ruins the better life Hassan, Ali, and Baba could have had together.

The regret/guilt chain, can't go on forever. It needs to stop for the story to have a good resolution. Amir had so many regrets : regrets that led to other regrets, moments that made Amir regret his mistakes even more, and etc. All these regrets can't just be resolved with a big surprise twist that makes every bad thing that Amir did look good. Amir needed a way of "being good" again, and he knew he couldn't solve all the problems at once. He needed to do a lot of things, make important decisions, and make sacrifices, to make himself good again. So, the last third of the book is focused on Amir's redemption. In this portion of the story, Amir goes through the toughest period of his life. Most importantly though, he makes a lot of sacrifices, and

inadvertently causes karma to take action. This is highlighted especially when Amir gets beaten up by Assef.

“What was so funny was that, for the first time since the Winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in a corner of my mind, I’d even been looking forward to this.” - “I felt healed. Healed at last.”

Amir claims he “felt at peace”. Which is ironic due to the fact he is getting wrecked by Assef.

The pain Amir endures is the same pain Hassan endured when Amir kicked him out. The same pain Baba endured when he had to lose his life-long friend and his own son. This is karma at its best. Amir acknowledges that he deserved his punishment by bringing up the pomegranates fight that he had with Hassan, when Amir took his anger out on Hassan and Hassan didn't do anything and said the killer quote, “Are you satisfied. Do you feel better?” Amir related that to his current fight with Assef. He felt comfort in knowing the fact that he endured the same level of pain as Hassan, not emotionally but physically. The contrast of the physical and emotional pain, reassures the reader that karma is working. Amir is getting what he deserved. Karma at its best. The other side of Amir’s redemption is him taking in Sohrab as his own son. He learns that Hassan is his brother and Baba had betrayed Ali.

“Baba and I were more alike than I'd ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us. And with that came this realization: that Rahim Khan had summoned me here to atone for not just my sins but for Baba's too.”

Rahim Khan summons Amir to make sure that Amir finds the proper way to be good again. He tells him about Sohrab and tells him to make things right. Amir interprets Khan’s message by making sure he takes Sohrab back to America. Amir is “atoning for baba’s sin”, Baba couldn't be a good dad to Hassan, but Amir can make up for Baba’s regrets by making Sohrab his own. This idea of redemption including Baba’s mistakes too, makes the story seem more than just Amir’s

regret. It highlights the fact that Amir's family has been carrying regret for generations. This makes the final conclusion satisfy a tension that has occurred for a long-long time rather than making Amir the standout character. Also, while making the decision to adopt Sohrab, Amir assumes that Hassan and Ali lived bad lives because of him, which is true. He wants to make sure that Hassan's son doesn't get the same treatment. This act of kindness and unification, lets the audience know that Amir has successfully redeemed himself and broken the regret/guilt chain.

The Kite Runner, a book that teaches the audience the value of honesty and loyalty. Without loyalty to his friends, Amir had to live with regrets throughout his childhood which haunted him. Amir's lack of honesty leads to everyone he cared about and knew getting hurt. Honesty and loyalty are what makes the story about Amir and Hassan, so sad and meaningful. Amir's lack of loyalty leads to the demise of a good friendship. Amir never admitted to it but Hassan was his best friend. Hassan was worthy of friendship, Amir never was. Even after all that, Amir still reminisces about his times with Hassan. So, the power of friendship can have a big impact on anyone's life; good or bad impact depends on loyalty and honesty.