



# The Kite Runner

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V-5 ; L- 1; S-4/N-0 . (In English and Dari, a dialect of Farsi)  
Running time: 2 hours 2 min. © 2007 Paramount Classics

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.  
Psalm 145:8-9

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:12-13

I love those films that take us into the unfamiliar territory of a different culture, such as the ones emanating from the Middle East, India or Japan do. Although director Marc Foster and screenwriter David Benioff are Hollywood denizens, the source of their film is Khaled Hosseini's popular novel based on his knowledge of his native Afghanistan. Even the opening credits prepare us for entry into an exotic culture by appearing across the screen in the form of beautiful Persian calligraphy. In order to fit into the two-hour span of a film they had to eliminate much of the middle section of the novel, but there is still much about the country and the experience of immigrants adapting to this country to make the film a real learning experience.

Amir (Zekiria Ebrahimi) and Hassan (Ahmad Khan Mahmoodzada) are two boys in the city of Kabul in 1978 who are best friends, even though Hassan is the son of the household servant Ali (Nabi Tanha). Amir's well-off father Baba (Homayoun Ershadi), a widower, loves both boys, observing Hassan's birth-day as well as that of Amir—though not with the kind of lavish party to which are invited the top echelon of the city that he throws for Amir. Amir and Baba are Pashtuns, the dominant ethnic group in Pakistan, and thus are part of the ruling elite class. Hassan and his father, on the other hand, are Hazaras, a people of mixed Mongol and Persian blood, and thus are looked down on by most others, such as the bullies who will so devastatingly disrupt the boys' lives.

Amir is such a docile boy that he realizes his father is disappointed in him for his lack of aggression. He senses, and resents, his father's unusual love for the servant boy, even though he and Hassan play together every day. The illiterate Hassan loves it when Amir reads to him from his battered copy of a story collection, and even more when Amir comes up with one of his own stories. Amir hopes to win the annual Kite Festival by being the last one to keep his kite aloft after a day-long series of aerial battles. (The film gives us few of the novel's details about treating long stretches of the kite string with a sticky mixture of glue and ground glass so as to cut the string of an opponent's kite—but which also leaves the hands of both kite flyers cut and bloodied.)

Thanks to the help of loyal Hassan, the best kite runner in the city, Amir does win the Kite Festival, and thus the long-desired approval of his father watching from a balcony. But the day of triumph also becomes the day of his life-altering shame. When Hassan dashes off to retrieve the kites, he is waylaid by the band of three teenage bullies whom Hassan had fended off some days earlier by threatening them with his slingshot. Amir searching for his friend, spies him and his attackers from a distance. Paralyzed by fear, Amir watches the three attack and rape his friend, and then he turns tale and runs away. When he sees Hassan later, neither boy mentions the horrendous incident, but deep within, Amir writhes in guilt and shame, which breaks eventually forth in a terrible way.

The tale is told years later, in 2000, by the adult Amir ( Khalid Abdalla) living in San Francisco, to which he and his father had fled when the Soviets invaded their country. Now the author of a new book, he is married to Sohrab (Ali Danesh Bakhtyari), the daughter of a former Afghani general, the genesis of their courtship fetchingly portrayed. On the day that he opens the box containing copies of his book, Amir receives a telephone call from Pakistan. It is the best friend of his father Rahim Kahn (Shuan Toub), the man who had encouraged Amir's writing of stories, had even given him a fine book with blank pages to write in.

"Now there is a way to be good again," Rahim tells him. Still filled with shame because of his failure and betrayal of his friend, Amir travels to Pakistan, where he learns that Hassan has a son back in their Taliban-ruled homeland. Struggling against his old timidity, Amir reluctantly agrees to return to Kabul and seek out the boy. What transpires next is both riveting and unexpected, with a portion of his childhood history repeated in a strange but satisfying way.. The film should remind Christian viewers that love, loyalty and honor are not just Christian virtues, but are strongly

affirmed by Muslims as well. Hassan shows incredible loyalty and acceptance of his friend, though Amir does little to deserve it—indeed, his two betrayals of the boy make him a difficult figure to like, his failure of courage being far worse than, say Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim. It becomes plain also that the Muslim faith, too, values grace or “a second chance.” And what a sense of loyalty and honor are embedded in Hassan’s heart, which on two occasions prove to be terribly costly, first to the boy and then the man!

The kites, which we see in colorful array flying high above Kabul and then above a beach near San Francisco, serve as a wonderful symbol of freedom, a love of which must lie close to the heart of Afghanistans. Readers of the novel should be pleased by the film, and those who have not may well be led to visit their library or bookstore. During this time of widespread fear of and prejudice toward Muslims The Kite Runner, both as a novel and a film, does far more than just entertain its audience. Although the rape scene is chastely done, it is still too intense for most children, so this film about two boyhood friends is suitable only for adults and mature youth.

For Reflection/Discussion -- There are spoilers in the following.

- 1) What are some of the new things you learned about Afghanistan and its culture from this film? What seems to be its version of the prejudice that has plagued America? Why do you think that there is some form of racism in virtually every culture/nation? How does even Amir, despite his father’s upbringing, show some of this infection by his treatment of his friend?
- 2) Compare the courtship customs of Afghanistan and Western cultures. What do you see as advantages and disadvantages of each? How does the Muslim customs offer protection and guidance to each sex?
- 3) Have you had problems trying to please a parent somewhat similar to Amir’s? How might this influence the way that you relate to another person whom your parent favors?
- 4) How is Baba’s friend Rahim Khan a great influence on Amir? Have you received similar support from another adult, encouraging you in some endeavor or talent? How did Amir show much later his appreciation?
- 5) What do we see and hear from Baba that shows that Afghanistan also was going through its own version of the cultural wars? What does the father think of the Mullah’s? How was his view later borne out?
- 6) What do you think of Amir’s failure to go to the aid of his friend, or even to summon help? Have you known that kind of paralyzing fear? What might he have done afterward to begin to make up for his failure? Why do you think he betrayed Hassan again? How did this bring about what Amir wanted, even though his father re-acted in an unexpected way? How is Baba’s reaction made clear by the later revelation of his past?
- 7) How is Hassan’s sense of honor far deeper than Amir’s? How does this prove costly for the boy, and then much later, the man?
- 8) How does Baba show during their escape that he also is a man of great honor—and of courage?
- 9) How is the Psalmist’s view of God similar to that of Muslims’? (What is one of the oft-used titles that Muslims use for Allah?)
- 10) How does Hassan’s action and his letter demonstrate that he shares a similar code of conduct with that of the author of Colossians?
- 11) In the light of Amir’s closing remarks—”I dream that my son will grow up to be a good person, a free person. I dream that someday you will return to revisit the land of our childhood. I dream that flowers will bloom in the streets again... and kites will fly in the skies!” what do you think the high flying kites might symbolize? How does Amir become free at last? How did you feel when Amir dressed down his father-in-law General Taher during dinner? What about Hassan’s son—how is he enslaved, and how do you think that he will become free?
- 12) What do you think the film and novel has to offer to a post 9-11 America?