

Focusing the Attention

By Anne Ferringer

The comparison between studiousness and love of God is not a common one in today's culture. Most are taught, at least in a public school system, that religion and education have little overlap. Yet Simone Weil feels differently, expressing that there is a correlation between attentiveness in school and the growth of one's love of God. She is not conveying that they are the same, but that the principles learned in the first can help increase the second. In Weil's essay "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," she discusses the relationship between the focus of one's attention in school studies and the growth of one's love for God. Her essay can also relate to the change attention makes in Amir's relationship with Sohrab in Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*.

Weil makes the point that "if there is a real desire, if the thing desired is really light, the desire for light produces it" (Weil 59). Upon Amir's return to Pakistan, Rahim Khan gives him the task of finding and rescuing Sohrab from wherever he is. As he moves from place to place, Amir is frequently questioned about why he insists upon this dangerous and seemingly futile search. These inquiries provide him with ample reasons to give up and return home, but he continues his hunt for Sohrab because his desire to finally attempt to set right his sin against Hassan overwhelms all objections offered. Amir devotes his full attention to his desire, the search for Sohrab, and by doing this, he increases his chances of success. For although Weil points out that the result is not important, she does imply that full attention to and desire for a certain outcome increases the likelihood of it happening.

It does need mentioning that such desire does not come without obstacles. Amir's initial reaction to the mission posed by Rahim Khan is to find and pay someone else to complete the task. "Why me? Why can't you pay someone here to go? I'll pay for it if it's a matter of money," he demands (Hosseini 221). The prospect of returning to Afghanistan, to his past which he had so carefully buried, to save a boy he has never met terrifies Amir. As Weil writes, "There is a great temptation to do the opposite . . . Most of us do this nearly always. We have to withstand this temptation" (Weil 60). Amir leaves Rahim Khan in a rage, angry at the truth his father never told him, Ali, or Hassan. This rage, though an incoherent mass of fury in the beginning, resolves into a moment of clarity for Amir. He comes to see that the opportunity to rescue Sohrab is a chance to finally end the cycle of lies started by Baba and continued by Amir himself.

Now that Sohrab has been rescued from Assef, Amir faces a new set of obstacles to rise above. These obstacles, despite being much less physically demanding are not easier for Amir to endure. Sohrab, formerly happy and carefree child, has been subjected to a series of horrors: the death of this grandfather, the murder of both of his parents, and his molestation by Assef. When Amir extracts him, Sohrab is quiet, withdrawn, and startled by even the slightest movement or touch. Amir seems to perfectly understand what Weil means when she writes that "Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention" (Weil 64). He realizes that Sohrab is quite rightfully frightened of the world and therefore does not force Sohrab to change or open up. Instead he merely tries to make Sohrab feel safe. This care and attention is just what Sohrab needs and he gradually opens up to Amir, speaking at times and flinching less and less.

This change, however, does not last. After his attempted suicide and the arrival in America, Sohrab is even more withdrawn from the world. Amir accurately describes Sohrab's

silence as a complete shut down, expressing that Sohrab “didn’t so much live with us as occupy space. And precious little of it” (Hosseini 361). Sohrab became like a ghost in the house; Amir described how Sohrab could enter a room unnoticed because he was so completely quiet and remote. Even Amir’s curious Afghani friends eventually stopped noticing and remarking about Sohrab, an extreme rarity for them. Weil would find this lack of concern a failure of the greatest degree to recognize “that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection . . . but as a man, exactly like us” (Weil 64). By failing to acknowledge Sohrab’s suffering, those around him were failing to fulfill their love of God.

Amir alone never stops trying to engage Sohrab and understand what he is going through. Amir relates how, unlike himself, Soraya “gradually abandoned her attempts at engaging him. . . . She had shifted to ‘Holding Pattern,’ waiting for a green light from Sohrab” (Hosseini 367). He instead continues to talk to Sohrab, trying to find something that will put even the smallest crack in the though shell Sohrab has erected around himself. Amir seems to realize the distinction Weil is expressing when she writes, “We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them” (Weil 62). Soraya would appear to follow Weil’s advice in waiting for Sohrab to give her the go-ahead, but this passive approach contradicts Weil’s overall message of giving attention to those in pain. Amir, on the other hand, never stops trying to connect to Sohrab. Rather than waiting for the moment when Sohrab is ready to open to him, Amir tries to show Sohrab that he will be there for him when he is ready.

Weil provides justification for Amir’s attempts, writing that “Even if our efforts of attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day a light that is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul” (Weil 59). Amir’s continual attempts to connect to Sohrab may seem to produce absolutely no reaction on the surface, but one day they may prove to tip the balance and

help Sohrab to find the path to recovery. In fact, one result has been produced: a smile. The progress may seem insignificant on the overall scheme, but it is a start and Amir realizes this. "It was only a smile, nothing more," he acknowledges, but "when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting" (Hosseini 371). It is with this insight that Amir strikes the core of Weil's essay and parallels her thoughts in her statement that "Every effort adds a little gold to a treasure no power on earth can take away" (Weil 59). No matter how useless everyone may think Amir's efforts are, they will eventually help Sohrab to awaken. And when he does, Amir will gain a reward that not even his strongest doubter can take away.

As Amir travels to Afghanistan and eventually back home, the focus of his attention shifts from inwardly to outwardly. Thanks to the thoughts and ideas of Weil, the reader is able to appreciate the changes he makes in his life. Weil allows the reader to identify how Amir begins as a cowardly person, content to stay in his bubble, carefully avoiding conflict and gradually shifts to a more selfless person, willing to risk his life to save the life of a boy he doesn't even know. But this is not the whole of Amir's transformation; after Sohrab is safely in his care, Amir continues to mature. He does not allow Sohrab to become a lost cause. Rather, he persists in attempting to make a breakthrough with Sohrab. He never backs off, as some do, passively allowing Sohrab to recover and hoping that the boy will reach out for help when he needs it. It is through Sohrab's rescue and recovery that Amir finally completes his coming of age.