

## Untying the Knot of Resentment

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December 6, 2013

### The Knot of Resentment is Painful

*“It is easy to be friendly to one’s friends but to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.” – Mohandas Gandhi*



There are some situations that seem almost impossible to fix. One seemingly unfixable situation is the entangled relationships of people living in and around the “Holy land”. In this region, tension, resentment and hatred appear as long lasting as the sub-arctic permafrost. When a spike in the emotional temperature occurs, frost melts, anger seeps out leaving a muddy, sticky and at times, fatal pathway.

Despite the many difficult challenges in the Middle East there are outstanding people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds actively working to remove barriers that block the path to peace and reconciliation. If you search, you may possibly find a defender of peace in a leadership position but more likely they will appear as ‘ordinary’ citizens. These ordinary citizens simply want to improve the lives of those around them. They are real champions who stand willing to pay a price for peace and at times that price may include their life.

Resentment is like a knot that keeps us tied to a prison. It is a key factor of why the Mid-East region seems stuck in a recurring pattern of violence and distrust. History is full of injustice and offers many excuses for people to resent others. As individuals, families, even nations we remain prisoners to resentment till we unknot it from our heart. Only one force is strong enough to untie the knot of resentment and that is the power of love.

As we look into our hearts we may see some knots that need untying. Often a story can show us something useful for our personal growth. The following story about Ezra and Bilial may provide a helpful example on how to untie the knots of distrust and resentment.

### This is Why I Hate You: An Uneasy Beginning



We came from forty nations to Rome as part of a multi-religious team of 120 RYS volunteers. We had set aside part of our summer to help construct a training center and a distribution center for Northern African immigrants. Once completed, these buildings would be run by Catholic organizations and feed, clothe and train immigrants in employable skills. In addition to the anticipated physical work we were hoping that our living, working and sharing together would model to a skeptical world the positive impact religious cooperation can achieve.

Among our volunteers were those who came from ethnic, national and religious backgrounds that shared a long history of animosity. Among us were black and white South Africans, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, Hindu’s from India and Muslims from Pakistan. We typically brought with us a set of attitudes and stereotypes that our forthcoming experience would challenge. For us, these experiences were like receiving a new pair of glasses offering a fresh, clearer perspective on life and the people who enrich it.

Moving into an unfamiliar environment offers a chance for people to look at things in a fresh way. In Italy, this was especially true of Ezra and Bilial whose new surrounding were very different than what they experienced at home. Ezra, an Israeli Jew and Bilial a Muslim from Jordan were both outstanding volunteers with strong academic and social service backgrounds. Bilial’s Palestinian parents left Israel during a time of conflict and had never returned to their childhood homes. As a family living in Jordan they carried the weight of that loss deep in their heart.

Bilial, Ezra and all the volunteers anticipated making good friends during our seven weeks together. We looked forward to sharing meals, work, conversations, cultural insights and hopefully lots of laughter. We were going to be living close together so it was important to establish positive relationships. In the case of Ezra and Bilial, this was not an easy process.

At one of the first meals, Ezra sat himself next to Bilial with a plate full food. Ezra proceeded by offering a series of questions and inquiries to Bilial in hopes of striking up a conversation. The response to each question was terse and razor sharp. Attempts at establishing a conversation were getting nowhere fast.



Ezra eventually reached a point of frustration and looked at Bilial and asked point blank, “Do you hate me.” Bilial, unabashedly responded, “Yes, I do hate you and I hate all your kind and I’ll tell you why.” For nearly an hour Bilial went on to emotionally explain his resentment towards Israel, the Jews and the current political situation. To Bilial, Ezra represented all those people and things he had grown to resent. The scene in the dining room

was a reminder that there were substantial issues that needed to be worked on if our group was to approach the level of understanding and cooperation we idealistically sought.

One way our staff worked to deal with those unresolved issues and attitudes was to put together as roommates people from nations or cultures that had grudges against each other. In a close setting, each person would be challenged by their presumptions and prejudices. When those participants made it through the program they were sure to have earned some valuable life lessons. Naturally, the first pair of roommates selected was Ezra and Bilial.

### **The Value of Work, the Dignity of Labor**

An interesting process of change took place at our worksite over the weeks together. The physical construction at our worksite developed in stages but so did our way of seeing each other.

“Rome in the summer is fit only for tourists and dogs” is something that Romans enjoy saying as they exit the city during the summer. At our worksites, the heat knew no favorites. The physical labor of moving wheelbarrows of dirt, passing cinder blocks, mixing cement and doing the numerous tasks needed in constructing a small building was made harder on account of the heat. Compounding these difficulties were our general lack of experience. During our first work week we shared various aches, pains and difficulties yet by going through it together it seemed a bit more manageable.