

Love Resolves Resentment

John W. Gehring
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Love Through International Interfaith Service

“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be un-lived, but if faced with courage, it need not be lived again.”

Maya Angelou

In the summer of 1939, the Imperial Army of Japan crossed the border of China and entered into Mongolia with tanks, airplanes and thousands of soldiers. This was in an attempt to aggressively expand its growing Asian empire. The Japanese fought hard and paid a price in blood while the Mongolians lost civilians and soldiers alike in the effort to defend their country. Eventually, Mongolian soldiers with the assistance of troops and logistical support from the Soviet Union drove the invaders back across the border.

Standing on a hill in the capital city of Mongolia, Ulan Bator, is a large monument that is dedicated to those who resisted the invasion and were willing to sacrifice their lives and fortunes to liberate their land. Sixty years later a group of international volunteers would ‘invade’ Mongolia again. This time, however, it was with the heart to serve its people.

This Time the Japanese are Invading with Love

In the Mongolian summer of 1999, 30 volunteers from Japan, Mongolia, China, Malaysia, Korea, Singapore and the USA participated in a Religious Youth Service (RYS) project that was designed to promote cooperation across national, cultural and religious differences. Mongolia was selected as the host nation because it was going through a challenging period of transition following the collapse of its ally the Soviet Union. Our multinational team of volunteers had made the choice to use part of the summer as a time to offer service and to make new friends.



www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/

Mongolia is a land of broad, sweeping plains and crisp blue skies. Standing on the plains, one can understand how its ancient horsemen, masters of archery, chose to ride out towards the distant horizon and find new lands. This urge for discovery eventually made them heirs to one of the largest empires in the world.

In contrast, the cramped capital city of Ulan Bator is stripped of much of its natural beauty. On first arriving, one is struck by the multitudes of tall, dull apartment buildings, constructed especially to provide shelter from the stark, long winters. Beauty was not part of the Soviet-influenced architectural plan.

While staying in the capital, our group enjoyed trips into the neighboring countryside where we could hike and ford the smaller rivers, using ropes to keep us from being swept away by the river currents. Most of the daylight hours were spent painting Dash Choe Ling Monastery under the guidance of the Khamba Lama, or building a playground at elementary school No. 127. During our second week in the capital, our schedule offered free time during which we could participate in a variety of optional activities.

Building Friendships



Several Mongolian ladies jumped on this opportunity since they had a longing to show their Japanese friends, parts of the capital that they loved. The Japanese ladies were excited to have a chance to see more of Ulan Bator and very happy that they were doing this together with their Mongolian friends. I was able to join this group and crammed myself into the van along with the others.

Despite language barriers the Mongolian and Japanese ladies really enjoyed each other's company. Laughter punctuated our sharing as we drove to historic sites, as well as to some of the girls' favorite locations. The five Japanese women were effervescently happy since they had made this long journey to Mongolia not only hoping that their service would provide something good for children and their families, but also because they really wanted to make new friends.

One of the girls shared something that everyone in the van felt: "We just get along so well with all the volunteers, and our friendship seems to grow each day we work together painting the Buddhist Temple. What we are doing at the Temple and the school speaks to the reasons why we are here."



1939 war memorial

Restoring Past Mistakes

Later that afternoon our van twisted its way up a hill to a place where we sighted a large stone monument. The formidable statue stood with dignity near the ledge of a hill that overlooked the city. We decided to stop to visit the monument and enjoy the panoramic view.

We walked up a pathway accompanied by families and small groups who seemed to be on a kind of pilgrimage. As we approached the statue, we could see a series of large stone walls etched with names and written accounts of the defense of the capital. The monument site commemorated

the Mongolian and Soviet resistance to the Japanese invaders. This week marked the 60th anniversary of the Japanese invasion of Mongolia.

None of us were aware of this anniversary, and the timing added an emotional poignancy to our visit. Like most Japanese youth, the ladies knew little about Japan's role in World War II. When the girls realized what Japan had done in Mongolia, a country that they were growing to love, they were shocked. Some began to weep; all had tears in their eyes. The shame of the history weighed heavily on each of them.

After some time had passed, the young Japanese volunteers turned desperately to their Mongolian friends and repeatedly said, "We are so sorry, so sorry. We did not know this happened and we are so sorry. Can you forgive us?"

Their Mongolian friends looked surprised at their request. "My friends, the Japanese came 60 years ago with tanks and soldiers to conquer, but you come with love and service to paint our temples and fix our schools. You are Japan to us. You have made a new and special relationship with our country and with us. We love Japan because of you."

The War Within: Resentment vs. Love

The Mongolian experience shared between the grandchildren of former enemies has a simple beauty to it. Young Japanese and Mongolians are the central characters but it could be repeated with people from other backgrounds. The constants for this formula for healing are the elements of sacrifice and loving service, whereas the variables of the equation include race, nationality, and persons.

This story stands in stark contrast to the news stories we too often read. Media accounts often scratch our hearts as they retell stories of hatred and brutality performed by those who fail to forgive, who fail to reach out and make peace with themselves and with others. As long as people are full of resentment, there is no room to be full of love.

Resentment has a monstrous power if it is let loose to seek its own course. The spirit of resentment seems to have a life of its own. It is not resolved and it does not disappear without being properly addressed.

Resentment, like love, is invisible. Both are real; both can and do affect the way the world is today. Love can be generated when things are rightly ordered, when giving and receiving run their natural course as water flowing in a river. Love is the central axis of the original plan of creation.

In contrast, resentment is an aberration, the result of a separation from the original order of things. Resentment builds when things are in the wrong order—a public servant leaves his role of servant and unlawfully pilfers money; a married man abandons his wife and takes the wife of another; an employee works to undermine her boss—these are examples of violating the proper order. There is an established order in the universe and when one runs against it, damage is the inevitable result.

Both love and resentment are moved by reasons that are beyond reason—even as the French philosopher Blaise Pascal once counseled,

"The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know."

Behind both love and resentment are powerful spiritual forces. Each is capable of digesting the other. When resentment swallows love, the results are always destructive. When love swallows resentment, it produces a greater transforming love. Of the two, love and resentment, only one will last through eternity. Our Mongolian friends chose love. Let's all choose love.

John W. Gehring has more than 30 years of experience in International service around the world. He served as the International Director of the Religious Youth Service as well as the Coordinator of International Service for Generation Peace Academy. John is a man with an incredibly deep heart that has been shaped by his appreciation of the diversity of cultures and people that make up our beautiful world.