

Gratitude

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July 24, 2008 Because I leave for the States in a little over a week, this will likely be my final blog entry during my stay in Ethiopia. This weekend I will be busy finalizing my assignments, orienting new project consultants, visiting with local friends, preparing for my reentry to the US ... well, you get the idea. It is therefore fitting and proper that my final entry in Africa be on Gratitude. I will refer to gratitude as both an experience and expression of my own being that has evolved considerably for me over the past 6+ months.

First and foremost, I am grateful for the providence that brought me to Ethiopia. As I mentioned in one of my first blogs, I would not have made this trip left to my own devices. Synchronicity was instrumental in my being here and I am eternally thankful.

Second, I am grateful for the people and relationships I have found here. The magnitude, depth and combination of beauty and warmth that I have discovered in the people of Ethiopia are amazing. It doesn't matter that the person was a waiter, beggar, housekeeper, taxi driver, guard, soldier, housemate, colleague, shoeshine boy, cripple, infant, shepherd, dancer or any of many other guises. From the "cradle of civilization" I have seen the common face of humankind and it is beautiful. I have experienced the collective heart of humanity and it is tender and kind. I know that I am more human and a better person because of the people and relationships I have encountered here and I am grateful.

In a strange kind of way, I am grateful for the opportunity to witness and experience, in small ways, some of the many difficulties and hardships others throughout the world face on a daily basis. I have learned that all challenges are relative. I have encountered poverty, hunger, handicaps, disease, desperation and isolation like I've not seen before. My "hardships" in life pale in comparison and are mere "inconveniences". I am forever grateful for the abundance of blessings in my own life.

Although I am unable to offer details of the following situations at the current time, I am grateful that:

- 1) Desi, at age 16, was able to connect with her biological mother following 6 years "on the run" from a fixed and forced marriage with a man who abused her and a father who prefers her dead.
- 2) Koki and John survived a 38 mile round-trip canoe trip across Lake Lagano after dark.
- 3) Adoni, at age 9, is able to truly feel, express, and integrate the depths of rejection from a father who has no interest in connecting with him as a son.
- 4) Ribka has the fortitude and tenacity to move beyond so many life challenges by taking risks, expanding her language skills, pursuing additional classroom education, exploring future career opportunities, and improving her quality of life overall.
- 5) Some TPO members have found an "inner voice" that enables them to act and speak from a place of personal conviction and strength in the face of opposition and possible oppression.
- 6) Don has established a foundation of faith and friends that will sustain him and his wife during her bout with cancer.
- 7) Koki survived a severe case of typhoid and pneumonia which put him at "death's door" for three days.
- 8) The consulting project has afforded me so many lessons about the nature of politics, power, chaos, fear; and the ways and means of responding.

Lastly, I am very grateful for my family and friends whose physical absence and spiritual presence have been most with me during the past six months. Both their absence and presence have enriched my sense of gratitude. Indeed, I am blessed.

Over the next month or two, I will undoubtedly write at least one more blog entry, offering a retrospective of my experiences in Ethiopia over the past 6+ months. It will be interesting to see the nature of those reflections that emerge with both time and distance separating me from my experiences in Africa. I, like you, am curious about what these entries might include. Stay tuned. TLP