

Peacefully resolving conflict: a firsthand experience from the Vietnam War

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On April 25 each year, citizens of Australia and New Zealand commemorate ANZAC day - the time in 1915 when a great many members of the army in both nations lost their lives landing on the Turkish beach at Gallipoli. Although that battle is long past, the national holiday remembers the ANZAC tradition of courage, mateship, and sacrifice, and honours veterans of both World Wars and the Vietnam War.



Beyond the usual ceremonies of prayer, wreath-laying, and marches down city streets, this time of remembrance gives people an opportunity to think more deeply about the reconciliation and love that heal conflicts of all kinds.

The author, Beverly Goldsmith, a Christian Scientist who lives in Australia, writes here of [lessons](#) she [learned](#) while she was part of a group of entertainers who spent four months in Vietnam during the war in 1969.

That ill will is a source of conflict might seem obvious, but the solution - a genuine reliance on spirituality, even in the face of difficulties - isn't always readily perceived as the path to peaceful resolution. I learned this while I was a member of a six-person show performing for troops in Vietnam.

When we arrived there, we were totally unacquainted with one another. It took only two weeks of living in cramped quarters in a Vietnamese village for us to find that we didn't like each other. Things got so bad that plans were made to send us home.



Vietnamese Village

Dismayed by the situation, I decided it was time for me to turn to God for help. This Bible verse came to thought:

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" - King James Bible, II Corinthians. 6:17. My first reaction was to laugh at such an idea. Just how was I to get away from these people? We were in each other's company twenty-four hours a day!

In pondering the meaning of the Scriptural instruction, I recalled these words from [Science and Health](#): *"Never breathe an immoral atmosphere, unless in the attempt to purify it". p.452.* This statement made me realize that I wasn't being asked to cut myself off physically from the others. The separation required was a mental one. I had to stop accepting and going along with hostile behaviour. I needed to stop thinking of us as a group of discordant strangers, and see us as united by all-inclusive, all-embracing divine Love.



This spiritual method of conflict resolution was outlined by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount (see King James Bible, [Matthew. Chapters. 5-7](#)). Here, our loving Master instructs us to be peacemakers, to be meek, merciful, pure, and forgiving. If we're angry with someone, we are to seek reconciliation, not separation. If we've been hurt, we are not to seek revenge. In fact, Jesus declared: *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" King James Bible, Matthew. 5:44,45.*

To do this may seem like a tall order. Yet, when we turn away from ill will and think and act from a spiritual standpoint, healing and peace follow.

Why is this so? Because man is actually the image of God. As His reflection, our true nature is spiritual, unselfish, and peace-loving. It is perfectly normal for us to be thoughtful and caring. The man of Love's creating could never be disagreeable or divisive. Each of us has one Father, God, and when we live in accord with this fact, it draws us together in harmony. We can more easily resist the temptation to be unkind in thought or deed and can love everyone as our dear Father loves us.

Two guiding rules from Jesus point the way: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself". King James Bible, Luke 10:27. Acknowledging God as the only Mind that exists is one way we love Him. Treating our fellowman as having this Mind, and cherishing each one as a friend instead of an enemy, is one way to love others.

We don't have to wait for another to change or to make the first move. We can be the ones to put divine Love into action. This is what I did. When the opportunity arose for me to be helpful or to share my personal belongings with a cast member, I did it.

In just a few days, as I prayed and displayed genuine kindness, the atmosphere changed. We began to pull together and support each other. Later on when we were in danger, the others asked me to pray for our safety and well-being. On one occasion I was even asked to read aloud Paul's inspiring letter to the church at Corinth regarding the greatness and power of love (see I Cor. 13:1-13). When I finished, one cast member, who was visibly moved, said that if everyone on earth practiced the love Paul was speaking about, we would not be in a war-torn country.

**So complete was our transformation,
that after four months and 133 shows,
we were presented with a plaque for being
the most cooperative group of performers
brought to Vietnam at that time.**

Although this took place years ago, I never cease to be grateful for and awed by the powerful example of the might of divine Love to heal strife and bring peace.

While my personal Vietnam experience obviously does not compare with the conflicts of war itself, it does serve to illustrate that the law of divine Love is omnipresent and omnipotent. It also encourages me to believe that when the peoples of this earth love God supremely and love their neighbour as themselves, conflict will cease.



Sugar & Spice show during Vietnam War
with their road manager. Photo by Beverly.

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