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A Revolutionary Looks Back

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RD Mathur, as a student leader in India, found that the greatest thing a person can have in life is a clear purpose

The following article is taken from an interview with RD Mathur, Founding Trustee of Friends of Moral Re-Armament (MRA – now called Initiatives of Change) in India. It is his account of how he became involved with MRA and the journey it took him on.

I came from a very privileged background. My father was the Finance Minister of a princely state of India. In spite of his position, I took part in the freedom struggle against the British and was deeply suspicious of them. I was a student leader in Delhi University and had founded the UN Student Association of India. I had followed Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and the leaders of the freedom movement. I was the rebel in the family. My father and I couldn't see eye to eye. When he came into the house, I found some excuse for getting out of it. We hardly communicated. I told him he would never understand my life, because I worked for my country, whereas he had to keep his position with the Maharajah and the status quo was his security and livelihood. That created a gap between us that grew day by day.

One day I came into contact with MRA, when I accidentally stumbled upon a stage production they had made. The play I saw was totally unexpected. It was a moving story of two brothers who could not get along. It seemed to me as if it were the story of my life. It had a huge impact on me. I suddenly began to realize: how could I unite the world when there was not even unity in my family? That play started something inside my heart and spirit and created a tremendous conflict inside me.

Some people who were performing in this MRA production later met some of us. I let loose my anger against the West on them. They listened and instead of arguing, they showed understanding. All they could say is 'we are ashamed of what we have done to you, to your people, but we do not want our mistakes to ruin your life and your future because you are still young.' I was speechless. They talked to me about making the inner voice my guide instead of my anger and hatred. I rebelled at the notion. But the next morning I woke up with the thought that, unless I dealt with that conflict and let go of some of the anger and hatred, I would remain a hypocrite all my life. I would be preaching a story I did not live. So I began to write down my thoughts and all the conflict that was inside. And I said: 'today I will start the process'. I picked up enough courage and walked into my father's office. But when I saw his stern face, I lost my courage and walked out.

I think it was the first time in my whole life that I really addressed God. I was desperate and said: 'God, if there is a God, help me to make the change.' Just saying these words changed something in my spirit. For the first time, I accepted that I needed the help of someone more than myself. I walked to my father's office. I told him that I had expected love from him as a son, but I realized that I had given him only hatred. I was honest with him about all the things I had hidden from him. And as I began to speak, it

was like I couldn't control my tongue and I poured out everything to my father. I had expected that my father would soon ask me to leave the house. But to my great surprise, for the first time ever, I saw tears coming out of my father's eyes. He told me that in spite of money and power, he had been lonely and had never known how to communicate with his family. He told me 'today you have broken that loneliness in my life and I am grateful.' And he embraced me.

From that day, something happened to me, which is difficult to describe. It was a total transformation of my life and a total shift in my beliefs and ideas. I realized that truth, honesty and reaching out to a higher power was the greatest gift, a treasure that I would not swap for any wealth or power or position. I found new faith and direction in my life. Because I was a youth leader and was constantly interacting with the political leadership of that time, the heroes of the freedom struggle, I was heading towards a political career. But something intervened. I received a letter of invitation from Dr. Frank Buchman, Initiator of MRA. It said: 'Europe today is wounded, divided and very hurt by the war. It needs healing and reconstruction. We in Europe need Indian help and support, because India has used the weapon of morality and non-violence in its struggle. We invite you to come and help us.' So I travelled to Europe to the MRA conference centre in Caux, Switzerland.

Caux was a new world for me. I had never met people of so many nationalities, of such different struggles, coming under one banner to seek answers and to commit themselves to those answers. When my time in Caux was coming to a close, I got another bombshell - a second invitation from Dr. Buchman, asking if I would be willing to put aside one year of my life to respond to an invitation from Germany. The invitation was for an MRA team to come to the Ruhr of Germany and help to deal with conflicts there. I felt afraid of moving into an arena which held no promises and also losing a year of my career. Would it stand in the way of my ambitions? I was forced to ask that inner voice again. After a lot of internal struggling, I agreed to do it.

I was invited to Europe when it was devastated. I had never before witnessed anything like this. However, it was not just the buildings and the cities that were destroyed; it was the souls of those who had lost their husbands, wives and children in the war that were destroyed and needed healing and recovery, not only physically but spiritually. We stayed in cities in the Ruhr of Germany, in the homes of workers, industrialists, business people and others. We talked and talked and all I could offer them was the hope that human nature can change; that history does not need to repeat itself.

Yet the wounds were very deep. Germans who thought they were invincible were now defeated. The world looked at them with anger and hatred and you could sense its effect. The only thing we could do was to talk to them, listen to them and share with them the certainty that things can change and that there is a divine power that can bring healing streams to wounds of the spirit and the soul. We could not replace the loved ones of their families, but we could build a new future for those who lived. It is hard to describe how many wives put their heads on my shoulder and wept. But their tears were the streams of healing and I witnessed the rebirth of a broken people through honesty, listening, sharing, caring and understanding.

However, when I would go to the cities of France, people would say that I was coming from the devil's land; that I must be an ally of the devil. We met families whose children were tortured in front of their mothers by the Gestapo to get information and it looked like an impossible situation. Those of us with MRA stayed for months in their homes, talking to them and started bringing healing to those wounds. The process went on until this news reached the leadership. In meeting after meeting, the Germans spoke, apologizing for the past. They went on radio, saying they would never make their

mistake again. Following this, we saw French people coming to Germany and saying 'we forgive, let us build for our children a different Europe'. At that time, the destination seemed far. I have to rub my eyes today, when I go to Europe and see that there are no borders, that people can move freely without visas from one country to another, that they have the same currency. And I feel that if Europe can do it, if such hate, anger and bitterness can be healed, if countries can be rebuilt and borders can be broken, then there is hope for the whole human family.

And it was not only in Europe. I found myself in Japan. And as I went there through other Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, I saw that the Japanese had left not only ruins of war, but that they had been a cruel enemy. I heard stories of Japanese killing children, in front of their mothers. Many families who had witnessed and were victims of this had pledged that they would never see the face of a Japanese again. They did not want Japan to have anything to do with Asia.

As some of us sat with Mr. Hatoyama, the Prime Minister of Japan, at that time and started talking with him, he was honest and humble enough to say to us: 'We Japanese do not know how to put right the wrongs that we have committed. We are ashamed. We are sorry. We are isolated and full of guilt. How does one get that guilt and shame out of one's life, to once again win the friendship and trust of people whom we've hurt, injured and killed? We Japanese have to swallow our pride and accept full responsibility for the wrongs we have done.' He asked if he could send some representatives with us to say this to other Asian countries that we were going to visit.

Seeing the sincerity of the Prime Minister and the need of Asia, without knowing what the consequences of this would be, we agreed. A few days later we were on a plane, with a Japanese delegation consisting of the leaders and members of the Parliament. Ramon Magsaysay, the President of the Philippines at that time, had arranged a welcome for us, not knowing that the Japanese were coming with us. At the aeroplane, there were young women with garlands waiting to receive the MRA delegation. But as soon as the Japanese stepped out of the plane, those women turned their faces and walked away. I suddenly realized what we had got into.

The next day a huge meeting to hear about MRA had been arranged at the University of Philippines. Three thousand crowded in, including Army Chiefs, Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, Chancellors of Universities and student leaders. With great enthusiasm they welcomed us and listened to what we had to say. Then the moment came to introduce the Japanese. As I looked at the audience, I thought that I was going to get tomatoes and shoes thrown at me. Courageously, the speaker of the Japanese Parliament, a man called Hoshidima, stepped forward and said: 'We Generals have been sent here by our Prime Minister and by the people of Japan, to humbly ask your forgiveness for what we have done to you and your people during that unforgivable war, in which you all were the victims of Japanese cruelty. We cannot ask you to forget, but we have come with a humble heart to ask for your forgiveness and to promise that Japan will never make that mistake ever again in history.' There was no response. There was silence. He moved a step forward, with his hands outstretched and said, 'I come here to ask your forgiveness. I beg you to please forgive us.'

In front of me, I saw the whole audience rise and for a long time there was an applause like I had never heard before. I saw and experienced the healing streams wash the past from the hearts of the people. The next day, it was headlines in all the newspapers in the Philippines. We received word in the morning that President Magsaysay had heard the news and wanted to receive us in his Palace. When we arrived, he was at the door. And as the Japanese were introduced to him, he grabbed their hands and said 'Thank you for your courage in saying what you said. In this spirit, every problem

can be solved, together. I want to welcome and congratulate you.' And as we sat around for a cup of tea with the representatives of Japan and the President of the Philippines, it was the beginning of the process of healing in Asia.

I could go on and on, with story after story. To me it is no theory; it is a tried and tested answer - if only people have the courage and the boldness to apply it and use it. You speak of the issue of Palestine; you speak of Iraq. I do not think guns will produce the solution on any side. The challenge of the whole world today is that yesterday's enemies meet in this spirit and become today's friends. Lately, leaders from the Western world and the Islamic world, have met in Caux; to search for a way to reach the hearts and resolve conflicts and build bridges. My prayer is that this process will continue. I am full of faith that no problem is insurmountable and I pray that on all sides men will find the solutions to these issues on which the future of the whole human family hangs.

I'm 79 now and I am enjoying life. I think the greatest thing a person can have in life is a clear purpose. And with that purpose, life is never dull. Of course, everything is not always smooth sailing; the ocean of life is a turbulent ocean. But if you have a compass and you have a destination towards which you are going, this turbulence becomes bearable, enjoyable and fulfilling. And I think the only message I would like to give to everyone is: 'Find your purpose, it's within you. Clear your life and when winds, storms and troubles come, you will have a compass inside you, a clear little voice that will never let you down.'

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