

Vicarious Trauma by Dr. Ani Kalayjian

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After several humanitarian rehabilitation missions,
I am finally home, sitting on my bed and
Wondering to myself – how do I feel?
Am I numb from all the traumas I've witnessed?
Am I frozen, devoid of feelings?
Am I so sad that I have managed to push
All my feelings down? Or is this vicarious traumatization?

I came face to face with the bulging eyes of poverty in DR Congo,
I witnessed the chapped lips of dehydration in Sierra Leone,
I cried with the neglected and abused woman in Pakistan,
I helped the young man with no legs in a village in Armenia,
And I wiped tears from the cheeks of a child in Rwanda...

But afterward I would always return home. I have a comfortable home to come to,
Unlike all the people I worked with.
I've returned home but isolate myself for a while,
Confine myself to the four corners of my comfortable home...

Was I feeling the guilt of having economic comfort?
Or of the privileges I enjoy?
Was it the disparity of education that I noticed destroying nations?
Or was it vicarious trauma?

My Armenian ancestors endured being homeless.
They were driven out of their homes, forced to walk for months
Through the deserts of Arabia on a march to their death.
Where is God, I wonder, when I am working in these traumatized countries?
But now I realize that all of the human race,
Every nation has experienced the pain and sorrow
Of being uprooted, conquered, and destroyed,
Only to start building all over again.

I also witnessed the raw unadulterated beautiful beaches in Haiti,
The brilliant peaceful stars in Lebanon,
The giant mountains of Kenya,
The breathtaking waterfalls of Sri Lanka, and
Armenia's indomitable Mt. Ararat.

As I sequester myself to reflect,
Balancing the good and evil,
Weighing the positives and negatives
Of all that I've witnessed, I remain in wonderment
As I ask myself: Do we really need the evil to be able to appreciate the good?